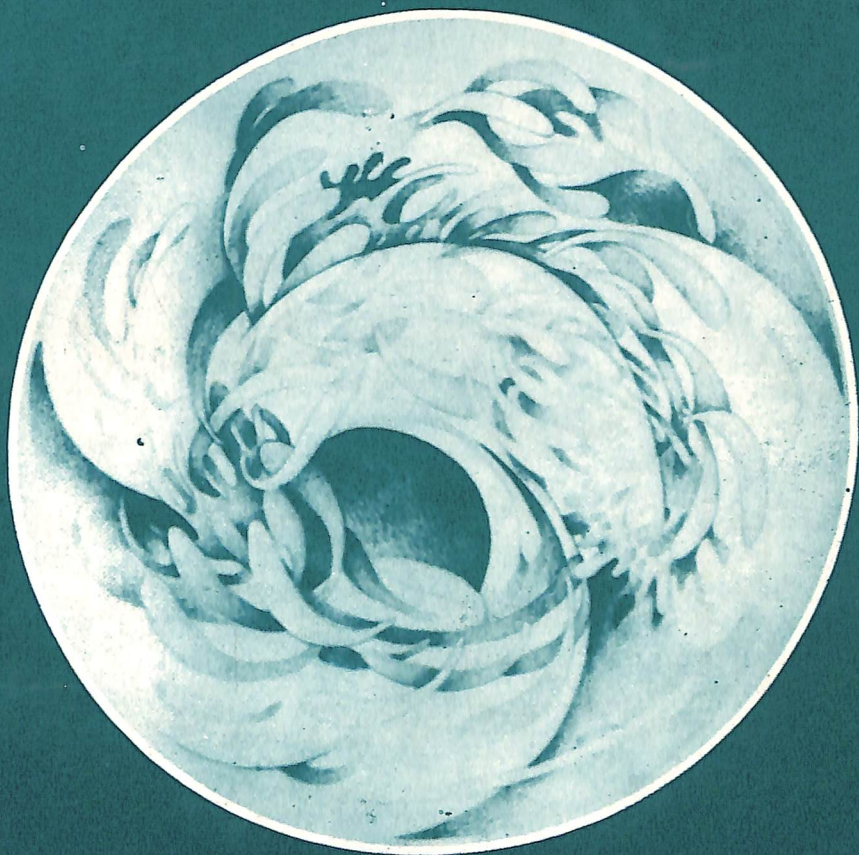


THE POWER OF PRAYER



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MUMBAI - 400 072.

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The Power
of
Prayer

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Illustrations by
Kay Kaiser



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Preface

The urge to live a more complete and harmonious life; the wish to free the mind from the weight of worldly cares; the yearning to soar high and discover a diviner existence—all these can be fulfilled through prayer. Prayer is the most direct path for spiritual seekers. It is immediately available to all students at any level of understanding. It opens up humble and honest self-examination and produces a perfect realignment of one's relationship to the world and to God.

Surprisingly, many spiritual seekers may doubt the validity of prayer. They may waste precious time by putting forth their efforts into secondary religious practices, such as doing charitable deeds, following a pure diet, or studying scriptures. They miss the goal of all practices—direct communion with the Highest.

Perhaps the word “prayer” has been misunderstood. An unfortunate connotation of prayer is supplication, which implies a form of beggary resorted to by the emotionally dependent. This is not true prayer, it is only a *preying* upon the Lord.

Those who practice prayer know its power and the sublime heights to which it can raise the mind. If you try it, the saints say, you will know its truth. You will experience for yourself how a mind that has become twisted and bruised by worry, heavy with despondence, can within a moment of sincere prayer be completely rejuvenated. In this rejuvenation self-doubts and recriminations wash away, the mind regains confidence in the ultimate good of itself and of life,

and the energy that was hitherto trapped floods forth with vigor. This is the incredible power of prayer.

Having purified the mind, prayer can lift one to even greater contemplative heights. The divinity lying in one's heart begins to flower, and in that flowering the ego gets weakened. Prayer then leads the seeker from the dualistic experience of separation and limitation to the immediate apprehension of nondual union with God.

In the following chapters, masters of several religious traditions address the greatness of prayer. Swami Swahananda, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, presently serving in Los Angeles, speaks of the psychological benefits of prayer: Prayer has the capacity of transforming a man's character. It frees the mind from selfish ideas so that noble ideas can rush in. The desires of the mind are transformed as one becomes attuned to the Higher.

In "Prayer as Invocation," Swami Chinmayananda, a renowned Vedantic teacher, explains that success in life is not accidental—it can be invoked by a strong will imbued with confidence. In the same way, success in spiritual life must be invoked by faith in and identification with the Lord. Prayer can be defined as the method by which the divine qualities latent within us are manifested.

Aldous Huxley concludes Part One, "The Meaning of Prayer," with an analysis of four types of prayer, showing how each one evolves to the next in intensity and selflessness, until the highest type of prayer—contemplation and union with God—is reached.

Part Two, "Appreciating the Divine," focuses on prayer as praise and thanksgiving. Dr. Abraham J. Heschel, a world-known contemporary Hebrew scholar, addresses the need to appreciate the Divine. Awareness of the Divine begins with wonder, a deep wonder at the mysterious gift of life. When one looks at life and wonders, the wonder of being fills the heart. This is true worship.

Sri Daya Mata, the American-born disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda, discusses coping with difficulties. She inspires the readers to live with faith, prayer, and surrender,

mixing with the worldly yet never leaving the divine plane. We all search for peace and joy. Where can we discover it? Swami Ramdas, who inspired seekers of this century by his great devotion to Lord Rama, explains that we must tune our mind with the Lord through prayer and constant remembrance of God's qualities. As the intensity of longing for supreme bliss increases, we feel His nearness and begin to understand that all is ordained by Him.

The highest form of prayer, which culminates in union with the Divine, is the theme of Part Three, "Joyous Communion." Swami Chinmayananda analyzes the different concepts of God that have evolved throughout the ages. We see in various traditions that the highest religious experience is the state of absorption in God. By refusing to worry, by seeing all events as the Lord's will, by serving in the world to exhaust one's inherent desires, one can invoke God and live a continuous devotional song of joyous oneness.

"Interior Prayer," from the very popular autobiography of a nineteenth century Russian pilgrim, quotes from a Catholic treatise on prayer. The message can be best summed up thus: "We think very little of God's presence and do not realize that we should be as rays of grace. . . . The method by which we can acquire this gift is constant awareness of God's presence. We should practice this until it warms our heart and enflames it to unspeakable love for the Lord."

The final chapter is written by the highly respected present Śāṅkarācārya of Kanchi in India. He cites Sanskrit verses that illustrate the nature of devotion. He asks: Why should we have devotion? In order to make the mind steady. "If you meditate on a thing with concentration, you acquire its qualities, and at last you become that itself."

When we understand prayer in terms of invocation, even the most rational seeker of Truth can understand the vital importance of prayer. The perfection and bliss of our inner Self can be ours when we surrender our sense of separation and attune our thoughts to the Divine. As we concentrate upon the higher possibilities, indeed they will start unfolding themselves.

V.B.

more as with the world's not never leaving the divine plane
 We all search for peace and joy. We can not discover it
 in our hands. We have justly received it. This century



importance of prayer. The presence and bliss of our inner
 self can be ours when we understand ourselves in relation
 and merge our thoughts in the divine. As we concentrate
 upon the higher possibilities, indeed they will manifest
 in themselves. We must first know what we wish to do.

PART ONE

The Meaning of Prayer

*The best prayer
is to rest in the goodness of God
knowing that that goodness
can reach right down
to our lowest depths of need.*

Julian of Norwich



Moses saw a shepherd on the way, crying, "O
Lord Who choosest as Thou wilt,
Where art Thou, that I may serve Thee and
sew Thy shoon and comb Thy hair?
That I may wash Thy clothes and kill Thy lice
and bring milk to Thee, O worshipful
One;

That I may kiss Thy little hand and rub Thy
little feet and sweep Thy little room at bed-
time."

On hearing these foolish words, Moses said,
"Man, to whom are you speaking?

What babble! What blasphemy and raving!
Stuff some cotton into your mouth!

Truly the friendship of a fool is enmity: the
High God is not in want of suchlike
service."

The shepherd rent his garment, heaved a sigh,
and took his way to the wilderness.

Then came to Moses a Revelation: "Thou
hast parted My servant from Me.

Wert thou sent as a prophet to unite, or wert
thou sent to sever?

I have bestowed on every one a particular
mode of worship, I have given every one a
peculiar form of expression.

The idiom of Hindustan is excellent for
Hindus; the idiom of Sind is excellent for
the people of Sind.

I look not at tongue and speech, I look at the
spirit and the inward feeling.

I look into the heart to see whether it be
lowly, though the words uttered be not
lowly.

Enough of phrases and conceits and met-
aphors! I want burning, burning: become
familiar with that burning!

Light up a fire of love in thy soul, burn all
thought and expression away!

O Moses, they that know the conventions are
of one sort, they whose souls burn are of
another."

The religion of love is apart from all reli-
gions. The lovers of God have no religion
but God alone.

The Shepherd's Prayer
Mathnawi II, 1720

I

The Benefits of Prayer

by Swami Swahananda

God is extremely attentive, my boys. He has heard every time you have prayed to Him. He will surely reveal Himself to you some day or other, at least at the time of death.

If you cannot settle whether God has form or not, then pray in this way: "O Lord, I cannot understand whether Thou art with form or without it. Whatever mayst Thou be, have mercy on me. Do reveal Thyself unto me."

Sri Ramakrishna

Prayer, said William James, is "intercourse with an Ideal Companion." It is talking directly to God. Great mystics are in a state of perpetual prayer. To them God is more real than the external world. Other men pray to God, accepting His existence on faith. In moments of emotional upheaval due to success or failure or apprehension, something is stirred up in man's heart; faith in a greater being or power is born, and prayer follows. Prayer is thus the deepest impulse of the soul of man. It is not dependent on calculated reasoning. Reasoning is an afterthought to prayer.

It has been questioned whether there is any necessity for prayer, arguing that if there is no God, there is no use of praying to Him; and even if He is there, can He change the laws of nature or of *karma*? It has been contended that with the advancement of science and the growth of secularization of life since the industrial revolution, man has lost his

unquestioning faith in an Almighty God and in the necessity of praying to Him. Certainly it is difficult to provide proof in favor of the existence of God that is immediately verifiable and tangible to grosser minds. But several points may be noted which will amply show the efficacy of prayer.

The most empirical argument in favor of prayer is that it relieves the mind of tension, which is the natural concomitant of a life of hurry and worry. It neutralizes mental repressions and purifies the subconscious. It releases an extra amount of hope and energy and thus enables a man to face life squarely. Life is not all sweetness, enjoyment, and success; it is drudgery, pain, and failure too. And more than this suffering itself, worry and apprehension about it eat into the vitals of man's life. With all the opportunities for enjoyment provided by advancing technology, man still lives in anxiety. Prayer frees man from anxiety and sustains him in moments of suffering. Prayer frees man from tension by unburdening his mind, putting faith in God's power to alleviate suffering, or by letting him see his problems in a larger perspective. Such psychological benefits are quite evident.

Universality is a test of truth, and there are thousands of people throughout the world and down the ages who have received help from prayer. Mystics and saints have achieved illumination through it and have strongly advocated it to others. This is in itself a proof of prayer's validity.

Prayer also helps us keep up our spirits in an otherwise hopeless situation. In many cases prayer is answered objectively; inevitably there is a subjective response in the devotee. Prayer has a great corrective power too, and it has the capacity of transforming a man's character. Much trouble in the world is created by tyrannous people who do not face their consciences. If they did so, many of their baser tendencies would be overcome.

The Role of Faith

Prayer presupposes faith. In fact, prayer is an exercise of faith. It might have originated in "a basic awe," as Rudolph

Otto puts it. But as we see it, the mental make-up of man is such that his heart eternally longs for a sanctuary, for satisfaction, for an abiding home. As a child has conviction about his mother's competence, a forlorn soul has conviction about the omnipotence of God and longs for His help. A man who prays usually has faith in a religion, belief in an omnipotent power, a sense of his own utter helplessness, and a yearning for a stable refuge. *Śraddhā*, a quality much extolled in holy books, is intense faith in God and in oneself. It is a common experience that men who have moved the world or a particular society had tremendous faith. Even the most ordinary man gains much strength when he is imbued with strong faith. God is the source of energy, and whoever attunes his mind to Him has direct access to that source. He becomes endowed with indomitable enthusiasm and optimism, and when another man comes in contact with him, he in turn absorbs these qualities. That is how men have become saints, fishermen have become apostles, and ordinary men have become heroes.

But is there a way for a man who does not have that sort of all-absorbing faith? Yes, there is. Sri Ramakrishna says:

One may attribute the various forms and aspects of God that are current in society to imagination, and may have no faith in them. Yet God will shower His grace on a person if he believes in a divine power that creates and directs the world, and prays with a distressed heart, "O God, I do not know Thy real nature. Deign to reveal Thyself to me as Thou really art."

Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna

Every science proceeds by taking certain hypotheses to be tested and then accepted or rejected. So if our faith is not great enough, we may take spiritual truths on trust at the outset and make our own experiment. An immediate result is sure to follow. More far-reaching results, faith and realization, however, may take some time. The result depends upon the spiritual evolution of the votary. If prayer is practiced with sincerity, fervor, and regularity, a man will surely get ample proof of its efficacy. And this will encourage him to further

efforts and deeper faith.

The function of prayer is to create a mental condition which frees the mind from the deadweight of worldly life, helping it to soar high to discover subtle and lofty truths. The mental climate created by prayer is comparable to that generated by a song, a poem, or a painting.

Sincerity is an essential condition for proper prayer. About the efficacy of prayer, Sri Ramakrishna said:

When the mind and speech unite in earnestly asking for a thing, that prayer is answered. Of no avail are the prayers of that man who says with his mouth, "These are all Thine, O Lord," and at the same time thinks in his heart that all of them are his.

Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna

Prayer is a companion to humility. The primary burden of our embodied state is the sense of ego. Secular education and the individualistic outlook of modern society have tended to increase this egotism. And yet, in the heart of our hearts we long to surrender and take shelter under somebody. We may be too egotistical or find it difficult to take refuge in a human being. But recognition of a higher power who is full of grace and sympathy can bring out our humility and surrender. Then we can unburden ourselves to Him, the Lord of our heart. This unburdening has the tremendous psychological benefit of freeing us from the pressures of life. The practice of confession had its origin in this great psychological principle and also in the belief that God or great souls can help man overcome the obstacles to spiritual progress.

Adversity is a great teacher. In fact, the lessons of life we often learn through suffering. In the *Bhagavad Gītā* Sri Kṛṣṇa recognizes dejection as a form of *yoga*, a path to union with the Godhead. We may forget the dreary side of life when we are young, healthy, and fortunate. At that time our minds are often closed to the higher principles as well. But when we have seen both sides of life, we may begin to ask if there is nothing beyond this apparent world. Then we pray. Only then can our hearts open to the transcendental truths. Suffering is a door leading to God, and prayer unlocks the door.

Man accepts faith by nature and reason by cultivation. That is, faith, and with it prayer, comes naturally to man, whereas reason must be cultivated. People in primitive cultures have used prayer, and every religion preaches it. Even rationalistic Buddhism had to bend before it. But prayer is not in conflict with reason. Reason can help prayer by clarifying its objectives and directing it beyond lesser aims.

The Power of Prayer

The question has been asked, as we told before, whether God can cancel our fate or change the course of the world. Our thinking in this scientific age is rooted in the idea that there are fundamental, unchangeable laws by which the universe functions. The Hindu theory of *karma*, based on the inevitable link between cause and effect, also more or less supports it. Is prayer capable of changing these laws? This brings us to the age-old tussle between grace and law.

According to Hinduism, the law of cause and effect is a valid law, but God is conceived as the bestower of the fruits of action. If He so desires He may compress the results of action into a shorter span of time, just as a whole life may be shown in a few hours in a film. The devotional schools of Hinduism regard God as the master of all situations and, while grace sits in His heart, His hand goes out to render justice.

According to the Christian conception, "The act of prayer, whether with words or without, is the act of putting ourselves more completely into the power of God's working so that some good may be attained or some evil escaped." Communicating our wants and begging favor are the necessary devices by which the act of prayer is performed. Prayer is worship and petition. It is meaningless if petitions are not answered. But how are they answered? They are answered "by some wider and deeper inter-responsiveness of people to one another, which God accomplishes in answer to that predisposition of personality that is the act of prayer." Prayer transforms our wants in such a way that they can be fulfilled and it creates responsiveness in other persons to fulfill them.

Swami Vivekananda explained that it is our "own will that answers prayer," for the soul has infinite powers. Regarding the efficacy of prayer, he said:

By prayer one's subtle powers are easily roused, and if consciously done, all desires may be fulfilled by it; but done unconsciously, one perhaps in ten is fulfilled. Such prayer, however, is selfish and should therefore be discarded.

Complete Works, Volume VII

The Rational Basis of Prayer

There are some minds too rationalistic and too tired of hearing of the weakness of man to pray. Vedanta provides for such people a rational, philosophical explanation of the efficacy of prayer. According to Vedanta, prayer's efficacy lies in helping us forget the embodied condition and become attuned to a higher Reality. Prayer thus purifies the mind as do other spiritual disciplines. When prayer is methodical, regular and fervent, it disciplines the mind and prepares it for higher realization. But even occasional or untrained prayer has some effect on the mind, attuning it to higher ideas at least partially and for the time being. As the mind is freed from selfish ideas, nobler thoughts rush in to fill up the vacuum.

Vedanta is neither a "historical" nor a "revealed" religion, as are Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Vedanta is based on the essential nature of man. According to Vedanta, truth is a matter of personal experience, a fact of internal revelation which can be achieved by everybody. So Vedanta values prayer for its subjective efficacy. It does not advocate prayer arising from weakness or from calculating gratitude, but it emphasizes prayer as a method of cleansing the mind, of suppressing egotism, and of searching out our hidden desires in the mind which must be renounced. A follower of Vedanta uses prayer as a step to knowledge, for though he may have the required faith in the teachings of Vedanta and an intellectual comprehension of them, he may not yet have realized the truth. Religion is the realization of truth, and prayer helps in that realization.

Prayer by its very nature is private—a soul speaking to the Soul. But people of similar religious attitudes naturally gather and join in group prayer. Here all the hearts join together in supplication to God. Group prayer is not an aggregate but a symphony.

Three types of prayer are mentioned in various scriptures of the world. Christianity in particular has developed prayer as a discipline and made it its most important method of spiritual practice. Petitionary prayer is most common with ordinary people, beset with difficulties and tossed by numerous desires, who pray for relief from troubles and to be given some advantage. The *Bhagavad Gītā* recognizes those who turn to God in distress as one type of devotee. And such devotees do get a response to their prayers, either through miracles or in the ordinary course of events. The subjective result is in the generation of hope, confidence, and enthusiasm, which are themselves no mean achievement. Intercessory prayer, prayer not for oneself but for others, is more unselfish in motive. Advanced souls have the power to redress the sufferings of others through prayer or through their strong, purified will.

The third and highest type of prayer is contemplation. The devotee surrenders his self-interest and takes the attitude of "Thy will be done." Meditation is thus coupled with adoration and consecration. The devotee who desires nothing in life but God finds it natural to pray like this. When this attitude matures, the devotee fully surrenders himself to God and becomes His instrument. Prayer then becomes continuous. His life itself becomes a continuous prayer. Whatever he does becomes an offering to God. Though this is the purest form of prayer, the previous two are not without merit. They improve one's conduct and character and purify the mind so that one can eventually practice the highest form of prayer. Thus prayer has rightly been described as a form of *yoga*, a path to realization.

Complete resignation to God is ideal prayer. Faith is recognition of a higher Power and Its loving kindness; a

prayer is resignation to that higher Power and utter abandonment to Its will. The higher Power is intensely personal to a devotee. The more his conviction, the greater is the fervor and the more complete is the surrender. The devotee then lets go of his ego completely and says, "Not my will but Thy will be done," "Not I but Thou." In this total giving up of the self there is no petitioning, no bargaining; it is one prolonged extinction of self-interest. In the Vaiṣṇava scriptures, differences of attitude even among great devotees have been pointed out. While some want to enjoy God, others want a relationship with Him of mutual enjoyment, to serve God and be enjoyed by Him. Kujā, Candrā, and Rādhā are examples of these attitudes.

The Vedic *śānti mantras* are a form of prayer. "Let my mind turn to the good," or "Let my will not go against Thy will," is the burden of many of them. They are repeated to drive home to the mind the basic ideas. By regular meditation on them the mind is soaked with those thoughts. Prayer thus clarifies the ideas, strengthens the will, concentrates the mind, and purifies it. Whatever brings these results may be considered prayer. Thus, seeking God or making the higher truths one's own is itself true prayer. Repeating the divine Name, a spiritual discipline in its own right, is also a form of prayer, usually of a higher type, when the need for petitioning has been transcended. A devotee prays aloud to God in the beginning, but as his mind is concentrated, he becomes silent. It is through this primarily mental process that an aspirant gains control over his mind and senses. Then the truth of the higher Self becomes apparent to him. He finds God dwelling in his heart and he longs to see Him. His mind is divided, as it were, into two halves—the praying self and the Self to which he prays. The intense yearning of the lower self to realize the higher is prayer. This is *upāsana*, or approaching God.

For ordinary aspirants, prayer must be coupled with other efforts. The theory of *karma* presupposes a particular mental make-up and latent impression in each individual.

But it also leaves scope, or rather it is also a call, for individual striving. In the beginning, prayer and effort must be combined. A student, if he is to succeed in his life, must harmonize both study and prayer.

Prayer is not wishful thinking. It calls up the latent powers in us and gives us the strength to overcome lethargy and other obstacles. It does this in a very unobtrusive way; for the very springs of lethargy, jealousy, egotism, and so forth, are gradually cleansed and all resistance to spiritual life is silently conquered. Prayer thus purifies the mind and helps full assimilation of ideals. When daily I pray, I forget my enmity with my foe, and I love him. What to speak of resolving all misunderstanding between friends and relatives? Prayer thus enhances familial and social harmony. By effecting personal integrity, it preserves social solidarity. By invoking the best in man, it works for a higher culture, a nobler civilization. Let us have recourse to prayer for purifying our minds, cleansing our social relations, improving the national cohesion, cementing international harmony, and attaining the highest goal of life.



II

Prayer as Invocation

by Swami Chinmayananda

The scriptures declare that the grace of the omnipotent Lord is functioning through us in all our activities. If this be true, there can then be no limit to the abilities and capacities of man. Since the Infinite is functioning through us, infinite are our potentialities. We see this demonstrated in a few people's lives. A worker during moments of inspiration is capable of excelling his normal performance. At times we also have experienced an excellence in our work that we cannot reproduce at will. At such moments we ourselves become excited onlookers at our own splendid performance. Such spontaneity is not always with us—it comes of its own accord; we seem to have no control over it.

To many of us it is an accidental mood, and that rare moment yields us deep fulfillment inasmuch as in that mood we excel in our actions and are rewarded by a sense of joyous satisfaction. Scientists, artists, and men of all occupations have climbed to the peak of their individual achievement during such accidental moods of inspiration and unearthly spontaneity. But according to Vedanta this is not an accidental happening. There is an infallible law behind these so-called accidents and there is also a definite discipline by which all can come to live continuously in the spontaneity of inspiration. Great saints amply demonstrate this possibility in the dynamism of their actions and in the magnitude of their life's achievements.

Secret of Success

A verse from the *Bhagavad Gītā* discloses the secret by which success can be assured for spiritual seekers.

To those who worship Me alone, thinking of no other, ever self-controlled, I secure that which is not already possessed (yoga) by them, and preserve for them what they already possess (kṣema) (IX:22).

If we consider this as a tip for the people who are sweating and toiling in the world, the verse yields a code of instructions by which they can assure for themselves complete success in their life. If a person is capable of maintaining self-willed thought (*saṅkalpa*) consistently and with singleness of purpose, he is sure to succeed in any undertaking. But unfortunately the ordinary person is not capable of keeping his thoughts in one channel of thinking. Therefore, his goal seems to be ever receding. Since his goal itself seems to be ever changing, his determination to achieve a particular goal constantly changes. To such a man of weak determination no progress is possible in any line of undertaking.

The greatest tragedy seems to be that we ignore the fact that thoughts alone create. Activities gain a potency from the power of thought that feeds them. When the feeder is choked and dissipated, the executing power in the external activities becomes feeble. Thoughts from a single-pointed mind must flow steadily in full inspiration, enthusiasm, and vigor toward the determined goal that the individual has chosen for himself in life.

Channelizing the thought power toward the goal is the first step for gaining success in one's endeavors. But mere thinking is not sufficient. Many of today's youths, though capable of consistently maintaining a life goal, are not ready to enter the field and invoke the possibilities dormant in the situation. Hence the need to do *upāsana* (worship). Through worship we invoke the "deity," meaning "the potential in

any given field." This should be a total effort for carving out one's victories in one's field of endeavor.

The Power of Faith

Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad Gītā* that everyone, be he a sinner or a saint, dull or energetic, cowardly or courageous, must invoke God, and when invoked, He is ready to bless one and all, irrespective of the manner or the motive with which they invoke Him.

In whatever way men approach Me, even so do I reward them. My path do men tread in all ways, O son of Prthā (IV:11).

All people do not worship at the same altar. Each approaches the one Truth by worshipping the idol of his own heart. Lord Kṛṣṇa declares here that in all churches, mosques, temples, in public places or in private institutions, in busy homes or in silent caves, in the open or in privacy, wherever and in whatever form a sincere devotee seeks to worship, it is He, the Self, that constantly supplies him with more and more faith to nourish the devotion in his heart.

It is well known that the greater the consistency with which an idea is maintained by an individual, the more he becomes fixed in that temperament. The more often a particular type of thought is entertained in the mind, the deeper that thought-channel becomes. These deep patterns of thought indicate the pattern of desires which the individual entertains.

It is a psychological fact that when we are determined to achieve a goal, we develop a faith in the goal and a confidence in ourselves. This faith is what ultimately takes us to success. The Lord explains that He rewards supplicants only by making faith in His devotee more firm.

Faith is a growing belief that is rooted in understanding. As faith increases, the mind becomes more and more efficient. A single-pointed mind is a mighty force against which no

obstacle can stand for long. Success is directly proportional to the depth of faith we have, both in ourselves and in the goal.

Imbued with faith, man invokes the potential in the activity of his choice and gains the fulfillment of his desires. Lord Kṛṣṇa adds that in all cases these desires are being verily dispensed by Him alone. The Self is the force in all activities, gains, fulfillments, and despairs. Faithful activity always brings about success, but the very existence of the field of activity, the ability to act, the fervor of faith that supplies consistency to all efforts—all these are possible only in the medium of the supreme Consciousness, the Self. Lord Kṛṣṇa, identifying Himself with this spiritual center of the universe, declares here that He alone is the One who supplies an ever-growing faith in all activities, and ultimately when the laws of action are fulfilled to the last degree, it is He alone who dispenses the result of each action. Thus is the power of invocation.

Impartiality of the Divine

Complete happiness and satisfaction lie only in the innermost precincts of the bosom and not in the external fields of profit and success, glory and fame. Unmindful of this enduring profit that lies within himself, man, bitten by desire, runs wild, bringing about chaos and sorrow not only to himself but to others walking on the same path. Seekers of happiness in the external world of sense objects can gain only insignificant success in the fields of sense enjoyments, whereas if the same effort is applied by them in the lines of constructive living, they can come to discover their identity with the Self. But due to the extroversion of the deluded ego, it identifies itself with the finite matter envelopments and revels in a world of countless objects, called *jagat* in Sanskrit.

Discriminating and careful seekers, who understand the utter uselessness of the pursuit of finite pleasures, detach themselves from their false egocentric lives, and through the

process of devotion to the Self come to rediscover their real nature in the sunny fields of bliss that lie unrolled beyond the by-lanes of all physical, psychological, and intellectual pursuits.

It is the law of life that as one thinks, so one becomes. The thoughts entertained at a given moment get crystallized to form the blue-print for the individual's character formation. In emotional literature expounding *bhakti* (devotion) there is always the sentimental explanation that only because of the Lord's direct grace some manifest a greater amount of divinity. This theory may be satisfactory to the few who do not bring their reasoning ability into the field of religious discussion. But to the intelligent ones, this explanation should appear unsatisfactory inasmuch as the Supreme would then have to be considered as exhibiting partiality. To negate this unsatisfactory explanation and to express the purely scientific theory, Lord Kṛṣṇa declares that the Self is the same everywhere and always, and that to the Self there is no distinction between the good and the bad; the Self entertains neither a particular love nor hatred for any living being.

The idea implied here can be better understood by studying the phenomenon of reflection. Even though the same sunlight gets reflected upon the different types of objects in the world, it is true that the quality and nature of the reflecting surface will determine the clarity and the intensity of the light reflected. On a piece of rough stone there will be the least amount of light reflected, while in a clean and polished mirror there will be maximum reflection.

Because of this difference in the intensity of reflection, sunlight cannot be accused of having a special love for the mirror or a disgust for the rough stone. Applying this analogy to the subjective life, it becomes clear that if the spiritual strength and beauty get reflected more from the hearts of the rare few and not at all from the rusted hearts of the many, it is not because the Self entertains in Itself any preference for or any prejudice against anyone, but it is only a natural phenomenon happening with perfect obedience to the law of the

universe: a prayerful mind invokes its divine qualities.

Even though the Self has neither any favor for nor any prejudice against devotees, to the extent they "worship Me with devotion," they are "in Me and I, too, am in them." Those who worship the Self with devotion come to rediscover that the worshippers themselves are none other than the Self that is worshipped. Realizing the spiritual implications of worship calls for a deep study. Worship is a technique by which the entire thought-forces in the worshipper are mobilized and directed to flow toward a divine point of contemplation, seeking a total identity with the Truth contemplated upon. When this is done in a spirit of devotion, the worshipper comes to realize his total oneness with the object of worship.

With this implied meaning in mind, when we re-read the verse, what Lord Kṛṣṇa means becomes clear. Even though truth has neither a preference for nor a prejudice against anyone, some noble souls come to experience and exhibit in themselves the effulgence of divinity, because, as the Lord says, they, through their devoted worship, have sought and discovered their oneness with the divine Principle, the Self.

Of all the spiritual practices, the most efficient is the constant remembrance of the Lord with a heart overflowing with love and devotion (*upāsana*). It is the Vedantic declaration that through *upāsana* the mind gets purified—and Lord Kṛṣṇa assures us that with a purified mind devoted to the Lord "we attain the supreme Goal."



III

Types of Prayer

by Aldous Huxley

The word "prayer" is applied to at least four distinct procedures—petition, intercession, adoration, contemplation. Petition is the asking of something for ourselves. Intercession is the asking of something for other people. Adoration is the use of intellect, feeling, will, and imagination in making acts of devotion directed toward God in his personal aspect or as incarnated in human form. Contemplation is that condition of alert passivity, in which the soul lays itself open to the divine Ground within and without, the immanent and transcendent Godhead.

Petition

Psychologically, it is all but impossible for a human being to practice contemplation without preparing for it by some kind of adoration and without feeling the need to revert at more or less frequent intervals to intercession and some form at least of petition. On the other hand, it is both possible and easy to practice petition apart not only from contemplation, but also from adoration and, in rare cases of extreme and unmitigated egotism, even from intercession. Petitionary and intercessory prayer may be used—and used, what is more, with what would ordinarily be regarded as success—without any but the most perfunctory and superficial reference to God in any of his aspects. To acquire the knack of getting his

petitions answered, a man does not have to know or love God, or even to know or love the image of God in his own mind. All that he requires is a burning sense of the importance of his own ego and its desires, coupled with a firm conviction that there exists, out there in the universe, something not himself which can be wheedled or dragooned into satisfying those desires. If I repeat "My will be done," with the necessary degree of faith and persistency, the chances are that, sooner or later and somehow or other, I shall get what I want. Whether my will coincides with the will of God, and whether in getting what I want I shall get what is spiritually, morally, or even materially good for me are questions which I cannot answer in advance. Only time and eternity will show. Meanwhile we shall be well advised to heed the warnings of folklore.

Those anonymous realists who wrote the world's fairy stories knew a great deal about wishes and their fulfillment. They knew, first of all, that in certain circumstances petitions actually get themselves answered; but they also knew that God is not the only answerer and that if one asks for something in the wrong spirit, it may in effect be given—but given with a vengeance and not by a divine Giver. Getting what one wants by means of self-regarding petition is a form of *hubris* (arrogance), which invites its condign and appropriate nemesis. Thus, the folklore of the North American Indian is full of stories about people who fast and pray egotistically, in order to get more than a reasonable man ought to have, and who, receiving what they ask for, thereby bring about their own downfall. From the other side of the world come all the tales of the men and women who make use of some kind of magic to get their petitions answered—always with farcical or catastrophic consequence. Hardly ever do the Three Wishes of our traditional fairy lore lead to anything but a bad end for the successful wisher.

Picture God as saying to you, "My son, why is it that day by day you rise and pray, and genuflect, and even strike the

ground with your forehead, nay, sometimes even shed tears, while you say to me: 'My Father, my God, give me wealth!' If I were to give it to you, you would think yourself of some importance, you would fancy you had gained something very great. Because you asked for it, you have it. But take care to make good use of it. Before you had it you were humble; now that you have begun to be rich you despise the poor. What kind of good is that which only makes you worse? For worse you are, since you were bad already. And that it would make you worse you knew not; hence you asked it of me. I gave it you and I proved you; you have found—and you are found out! Ask of Me better things than these, greater things than these. Ask of Me spiritual things. Ask of Me Myself."

St. Augustine

O Lord, I, a beggar, ask of Thee more than a thousand kings may ask of Thee. Each one has something he needs to ask of Thee; I have come to ask Thee to give me Thyself.

Ansari of Herat

In the words of Aquinas, it is legitimate for us to pray for anything which is legitimate for us to desire. There are some things that nobody has the right to desire—such as the fruits of crime or wrong-doing. Other things may be legitimately desired by people on one level of spiritual development, but should not be desired (and indeed cease to be desired) by those on another, higher level. Thus, St. François de Sales had reached a point where he could say, "I have hardly any desires, but if I were to be born again I should have none at all. We should ask nothing and refuse nothing, but leave ourselves in the arms of divine Providence without wasting time in any desire, except to will what God wills of us." But meanwhile the third clause of the Lord's Prayer is repeated daily by millions, who have not the slightest intention of letting any will be done, except their own.

The savour of wandering in the ocean of deathless life
has rid me of all my asking;
As the tree is in the seed, so all diseases are in this asking.

Kabir

Lord, I know not what to ask of Thee. Thou only knowest what I need. Thou lovest me better than I know how to love myself. Father, give to Thy child that which he himself knows not how to ask. Smite or heal, depress me or raise me up: I adore all Thy purposes without knowing them. I am silent; I offer myself up in a sacrifice; I yield myself to Thee; I would have no other desire than to accomplish Thy will. Teach me to pray. Pray Thyself in me.

Fénelon

(A dervish was tempted by the devil to cease calling upon Allah, on the ground that Allah never answered, "Here am I." The prophet Khadir appeared to him in a vision with a message from God.)

Was it not I who summoned thee to my service?

Was it not I who made thee busy with my name?

Thy calling "Allah!" was my "Here am I."

Jalu'l-Din Rumi

I pray God the Omnipotent to place us in the ranks of His chosen, among the number of those whom He directs to the path of safety; in whom He inspires fervor lest they forget him; whom He cleanses from all defilement, that nothing may remain in them except Himself; yea, of those whom He indwells completely, that they may adore none beside Him.

Al-Ghazzali

Intercession

About intercession, as about so many other subjects, it is William Law who writes most clearly, simply, and to the point.

By considering yourself as an advocate with God for your neighbors and acquaintances, you would never find it hard to be at peace with them yourself. It would be easy for you to bear with and forgive those, for whom you particularly implored the divine mercy and forgiveness.

William Law

Intercession is the best arbitrator of all differences, the best promoter of true friendship, the best cure and preservative against all unkind tempers, all angry and haughty passions.

William Law

You cannot possibly have any ill-temper, or show any unkind behavior to a man for whose welfare you are so much concerned, as to be his advocate with God in private. For you cannot possibly despise and ridicule that man whom your private prayers recommend to the love and favor of God.

William Law

Adoration

Intercession, then, is at once the means to, and the expression of, the love of one's neighbor. And in the same way adoration is the means to, and the expression of, the love of God—a love that finds its consummation in the unitive knowledge of the Godhead, which is the fruit of contemplation. It is to these higher forms of communion with God that the authors of the following extracts refer whenever they use the word "prayer."

The aim and end of prayer is to revere, to recognize and to adore the sovereign majesty of God, through what He is in Himself rather than what He is in regard to us, and rather to love his goodness by the love of that goodness itself than for what it sends us.

Bourgoing

In prayer he (Charles de Condren) did not stop at the frontiers of his knowledge and his reasoning. He adored God and his mysteries as they are in themselves and not as he understood them.

Amelote

"What God is in Himself, "God and his mysteries as they are in themselves"—the phrases have a Kantian ring. But if Kant was right and the Thing in itself is unknowable, Bourgoing, De Condren, and all the other masters of the spiritual life were engaged in a wild goose chase. But Kant was right only as regards minds that have not yet come to enlightenment and deliverance. To such minds Reality, whether material, psychic, or spiritual, presents itself as it is darkened, tinged, and refracted by the medium of their own individual natures. But in those who are pure in heart and pure in spirit

there is no distortion of Reality, because there is no separate selfhood to obscure or refract, no painted lantern slide of intellectual beliefs and hallowed imagery to give a personal and historical coloring to the "white radiance of Eternity." For such minds, as Olier says, "even ideas of the saints, of the Blessed Virgin, and the sight of Jesus Christ in his humanity are impediments in the way of the sight of God in his purity." The Thing in itself *can* be perceived—but only by one who, in himself, is no-thing.

By prayer I do not understand petition or supplication which, according to the doctrines of the schools, is exercised principally by the understanding, being a signification of what the person desires to receive from God. But prayer here specially meant is an offering and giving to God whatsoever He may justly require from us.

Now prayer, in its general notion, may be defined to be an elevation of the mind to God, or more largely and expressly thus: prayer is an actuation of an intellective soul toward God, expressing, or at least implying, an entire dependence on Him as the author and fountain of all good, a will and readiness to give Him his due, which is no less than all love, all obedience, adoration, glory, and worship, by humbling and annihilating the self and all creatures in His presence; and lastly, a desire and intention to aspire to a union of spirit with Him.

Hence it appears that prayer is the most perfect and most divine action that a rational soul is capable of. It is of all actions and duties the most indispensably necessary.

Augustine Baker

Lord, teach me to seek Thee and reveal Thyself to me when I see Thee. For I cannot seek Thee except Thou teach me, nor find Thee except Thou reveal Thyself. Let me seek Thee in longing, let me long for Thee in seeking: let me find Thee in love and love Thee in finding. Lord, I acknowledge and I thank Thee that Thou has created me in this Thine image, in order that I may be mindful of Thee, may conceive of Thee and love Thee: but that image has been so consumed and wasted away by vices and obscured by the smoke of wrongdoing that it cannot achieve that for which it was made, except Thou renew it and create it anew. Is the eye of the soul darkened by its infirmity, or dazzled by Thy glory? Surely, it

is both darkened in itself and dazzled by Thee. Lord, this is the unapproachable light in which Thou dwellest. Truly I see it not, because it is too bright for me; and yet whatever I see, I see through it, as the weak eye sees what it sees through the light of the sun, which in the sun itself it cannot look upon. O supreme and unapproachable light, O holy and blessed Truth, how far art Thou from me who am so near to Thee, how far art Thou removed from my vision, though I am so near to Thine! Everywhere Thou art wholly present, and I see Thee not. In Thee I move and in Thee I have my being, and cannot come to Thee, Thou art within me and about me, and I feel Thee not.

St. Anselm

Oh Lord, put no trust in me; for I shall surely fail if thou uphold me not.

St. Philip Neri

To pretend to devotion without great humility and renunciation of all worldly tempers is to pretend to impossibilities. He that would be devout must first be humble, have a full sense of his own miseries and wants and the vanity of the world, and then his soul will be full of desire after God. A proud, or vain, or worldly-minded man may use a manual of prayers, but he cannot be devout, because devotion is the application of a humble heart to God as its only happiness.

William Law

The spirit, in order to work, must have all sensible images, both good and bad, removed. The beginner in a spiritual course commences with the use of good sensible images, and it is impossible to begin in a good spiritual course with the exercises of the spirit. . . . Those souls who have not a propensity to the interior must abide always in the exercises, in which sensible images are used, and these souls will find the sensible exercises very profitable to themselves and to others, and pleasing to God. And this is the way of the active life. But others, who have the propensity to the interior, do not always remain in the exercises of the senses, but after a time these will give place to the exercises of the spirit, which are independent of the senses and the imagination and consist simply in the elevation of the will of the intellective soul to God. . . . The soul elevates her will toward God, apprehended by the understanding as a spirit,

and not as an imaginary thing, the human spirit in this way aspiring to a union with the divine Spirit.

Augustine Baker

You tell me you do nothing in prayer. But what do you want to do in prayer except what you are doing, which is, presenting and representing your nothingness and misery to God? When beggars expose their ulcers and their necessities to our sight, that is the best appeal they can make. But from what you tell me, you sometimes do nothing of this, but lie there like a shadow or a statue. They put statues in palaces simply to please the prince's eyes. Be content to be that in the presence of God: He will bring the statue to life when He pleases.

St. François de Sales

I have come to see that I do not limit my mind enough simply to prayer, that I always want to do something myself in it, wherein I do very wrong. . . . I wish most definitely to cut off and separate my mind from all that, and to hold it with all my strength, as much as I can, to the sole regard and simple unity. By allowing the fear of being ineffectual to enter into the state of prayer, and by wishing to accomplish something myself. I spoilt it all.

St. Jeanne Chantel

So long as you seek Buddhahood, specifically exercising yourself for it, there is no attainment for you.

Yung-chia Ta-shih

"How does a man set himself in harmony with the Tao?"
"I am already out of harmony."

Shih-t'ou

How shall I grasp it? Do not grasp it. That which remains when there is no more grasping is the Self.

Pañcadaśī

I order you to remain simply either in God or close to God, without trying to do anything there, and without asking anything of Him, unless He urges it.

St. François de Sales

Contemplation

Adoration is an activity of the loving, but still separate, individuality. Contemplation is the state of union with the

divine Ground of all being. The highest prayer is the most passive. Inevitably; for the less there is of self, the more there is of God. That is why the path to passive, or infused contemplation is so hard and, for many, so painful—a passage through successive or simultaneous Dark Nights, in which the pilgrim must die to the life of sense as an end in itself, to the life of private and even of traditionally hallowed thinking and believing, and finally to the deep source of all ignorance and evil, the life of the separate, individualized will.



and all creatures, in herb and grass,
knew God
—what He is, how He is, and what is His Will.
—John 1:1-3

... of all being. The highest prayer is the most
 ...; for the less there is of self, the more there
 ... that is why the prayer is in itself a prayer
 ... and, for many, to find a prayer
 ... in which



... the prayer is the most
 ... for the less there is of self, the more there
 ... that is why the prayer is in itself a prayer
 ... and, for many, to find a prayer
 ... in which



PART TWO

Appreciating the Divine

*In this light,
my spirit soon saw through all things;
and in all creatures, in herb and grass,
knew God
—who He is, how He is, and what is His Will.*

Jakob Boehm



A man can put away all the imaginings that present themselves to him, hush the understanding, calm the memory, and fix it upon our Lord, considering how he is in His presence, making now no speculations upon the secret things of God.

Let a man imprison himself within his own self, in the center of his soul, wherein is the image of God, and there let him wait upon Him, as one listens to another speaking from some high tower, or as though he had Him within his heart and as if in all creation there were no other thing save God and his soul. Even himself should he forget,

and that which he is doing, for, as one of the Fathers said,

That prayer is perfect in which he who is praying remembers not that he is praying.

Some few there are so far captivated by the love of God, that hardly have they begun to think upon Him when immediately the memory of His dear Name melts all their being. . . . And others, not only in the exercise of prayer, but apart from it, are so absorbed and immersed in God that they forget all things—yea, even themselves—for Him.

Piedro de Alcantara

IV

Wonder

by Abraham J. Heschel

Among the many things that religious tradition holds in store for us is *a legacy of wonder*. The surest way to suppress our ability to understand the meaning of God and the importance of worship is *to take things for granted*. Indifference to the sublime wonder of living is the root of sin.

Modern man fell into the trap of believing that everything can be explained, that reality is a simple affair which has only to be organized in order to be mastered. All enigmas can be solved, and all wonder is nothing but "the effect of novelty upon ignorance." The world, he was convinced, is its own explanation, and there is no necessity to go beyond the world in order to account for the existence of the world. This lack of wonder, this exaggeration of the claim of scientific inquiry, is more characteristic of writers of popular science books and of interpreters of science to the laymen than of the creative scientists themselves. Spencer and others "seem to be possessed with the idea that science has got the universe pretty well ciphered down to a fine point; while the Faradays and Newtons seem to themselves like children who have picked up a few pretty pebbles upon the ocean beach. But most of us find it difficult to recognize the greatness and wonder of things familiar to us." "The facts of the case, we venture to say, are so wonderful that from first to last no general impression of Nature reached along scientific or any other lines can be even in the direction of being true that does

not sound the note of joyous appreciation and of reverent wonder." ²

... Wonder or radical amazement is the chief characteristic of the religious man's attitude toward history and nature. One attitude is alien to his spirit: taking things for granted, regarding events as a natural course of things. To find an approximate cause of a phenomenon is no answer to his ultimate wonder. He knows that there are laws that regulate the course of natural processes; he is aware of the regularity and pattern of things. However, such knowledge fails to mitigate his sense of perpetual surprise at the fact that there are facts at all. Looking at the world he would say, "This is the Lord's doing, it is marvelous in our eyes" (Psalms 118:23).

That "wonder is the feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder" was stated by Plato ³ and maintained by Aristotle: "For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize." ⁴ ... Wonder is the prelude to knowledge; it ceases once the cause of a phenomenon is explained. ⁵

But does the worth of wonder merely consist in its being a stimulant to the acquisition of knowledge? Is wonder the same as curiosity? To the prophets, wonder is *a form of thinking*. It is not the beginning of knowledge but an act that goes beyond knowledge; it does not come to an end when knowledge is acquired; it is an attitude that never ceases. There is no answer in the world to man's radical amazement.

Awareness of the Divine

As civilization advances, the sense of wonder declines. Such decline is an alarming symptom of our state of mind. Mankind will not perish for want of information; but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder.

Awareness of the divine begins with wonder. It is the

result of what man does with his higher incomprehension. The greatest hindrance to such awareness is our adjustment to conventional notions, to mental clichés. Wonder or radical amazement, the state of maladjustment to words and notions, is therefore a prerequisite for an authentic awareness of that which is.

Radical amazement has a wider scope than any other act of man. While any act of perception or cognition has as its object a selected segment of reality, radical amazement refers to all of reality; not only to what we see, but also to the very act of seeing, as well as to our own selves, to the selves that see and are amazed at their ability to see.

The grandeur or mystery of being is not a particular puzzle to the mind, as, for example, the cause of volcanic eruptions. We do not have to go to the end of reasoning to encounter it. Grandeur or mystery is something with which we are confronted everywhere and at all times. Even the very act of thinking baffles our thinking, just as every intelligible fact is, by virtue of its being a fact, drunk with baffling aloofness. Does not mystery reign within reasoning, within perception, within explanation? What formula could explain and solve the enigma of the very fact of thinking?

What fills us with radical amazement is not the relations in which everything is embedded but the fact that even the minimum of perception is a maximum of enigma. The most incomprehensible fact is the fact that we comprehend at all.

. . . . In radical amazement, the Biblical man faces "*the great things and unsearchable, the wondrous things without number*" (Job 5:9). He encounters them in space and in time, in nature ⁶ and in history; ⁷ not only in the uncommon but also in the common occurrences of nature. ⁸ Not only do the things outside of him evoke the amazement of the Biblical man; his own being fills him with awe.

I will give thanks unto Thee
For I am fearfully and marvelously made;
Wondrous are Thy works;
And that my soul knoweth exceedingly.

(Psalms 139:14)

The profound and perpetual awareness of the wonder of being has become a part of the religious consciousness of the Jew. Three times a day we pray:

We thank Thee

For Thy miracles which are daily with us,

For Thy continual marvels

In the evening liturgy we recite the words of Job (9:10):

Who does great things past finding out,

Marvelous things without number.

Every evening we recite: "He creates light and makes the dark." Twice a day we say: "He is One." What is the meaning of such repetition? A scientific theory, once it is announced and accepted, does not have to be repeated twice a day. The insights of wonder must be constantly kept alive. Since there is a need for daily wonder, there is a need for daily *worship*.

Source of Prayer

The sense for the "miracles which are daily with us," the sense for the "continual marvels," is the source of prayer. There is no worship, no music, no love, if we take for granted the blessings or defeats of living. No routine of the social, physical, or physiological order must dull our sense of surprise at the fact that there *is* a social, a physical, or a physiological order. We are trained in maintaining our sense of wonder by uttering a prayer before the enjoyment of food. Each time we are about to drink a glass of water, we remind ourselves of the eternal mystery of creation, "Blessed be Thou . . . by Whose word all things come into being." A trivial act and a reference to the supreme miracle. Wishing to eat bread or fruit, to enjoy a pleasant fragrance or a cup of wine; on tasting fruit in season for the first time; on seeing a rainbow, or the ocean; on noticing trees when they blossom; on meeting a sage in Torah or in secular learning; on hearing good or bad tidings—we are taught to invoke His great name and our awareness of Him. Even on performing a physiological function we say "Blessed be Thou . . . who healest all flesh and *doest wonders*."

This is one of the goals of the Jewish way of living: to experience commonplace deeds as spiritual adventures, to feel the hidden love and wisdom in all things.

Said David the king: "I shall testify to the love of the Holy One, blessed be He, and to the benefits He confers upon Israel, hour by hour, and day by day. Day by day man is sold (into slavery), and every day he is redeemed; every day the soul of man is taken from him, and delivered to the Keeper; on the morrow it is returned to him; as it is written: *Into Thy hand I commit my spirit: Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, Thou God of truth* (Psalms 31:6). Every day miracles such as those that occurred at the Exodus come upon man; every day he experiences redemption, like those who went forth from Egypt; every day he is fed at the breasts of his mother; every day he is punished for his deeds, like a child by his master." ⁹

The sense of wonder and transcendence must not become "a cushion for the lazy intellect." It must not be a substitute for analysis where analysis is possible; it must not stifle doubt where doubt is legitimate. It must, however, remain a constant awareness if man is to remain true to the dignity of God's creation, because such awareness is the spring of all creative thinking.

Such awareness was the wellspring of Kant's basic insight. "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and the more steadily we reflect on them: *the starry heavens above and the moral law within* The former view of a countless multitude of worlds annihilates, as it were, my importance as an *animal creature*, which after it has been for a short time provided with vital power, one knows not how, must again give back the matter of which it was formed to the planet it inhabits (a mere speck in the universe). The second, on the contrary, infinitely elevates my worth as an intelligence by my personality, in which the moral law reveals to me a life independent of animality and even of the whole sensible world—at least so far as may be inferred from the destination assigned to my existence by this law, a destination not restricted to conditions and limits of this life, but reaching into the infinite." ¹⁰

Footnotes

1. Charles S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Cambridge, Mass., 1935, Vol. V., p. 65.
2. J. Arthur Thomson, *The System of Inanimate Nature*, p. 650.
3. *Theaetetus*, 155d.
4. *Metaphysica*, 12, 982b12.
5. Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, 847all.
6. Job 5:10-16; Isaiah 25:1-4; Psalms 107:8, 15, 21, 24, 31; Isaiah 40:26.
7. Exod. 3:20; 34:10; Joshua 3:5; Jer. 21:2; Micah 7:15; Psalms 72:18; 86:10; 98:1; 106:22; 136:4; Job 9:10.
8. Job 37:5-13.
9. *Sedar Eliyahu Rabba*, ch. 2, ed. Friedmann, p.8 (in Nahum N. Glatzer, *In Time and Eternity*, pp.22 f.); *Pesikta Rabbati*, ch. 33, ed. Friedmann, p.152a; *Nedarim*, 41a.
10. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Abbott, London, 1889, p. 260.



V

Spiritualizing Life

by Sri Daya Mata

By adhering to just four principals, the devotee can cope successfully with whatever difficulties he may encounter, whether in his spiritual *sādhana* (path of spiritual discipline) or in the ordinary affairs of life.

First comes faith in God. In any trial, strive for faith; it is developed by making God the polestar of your life. Pray in meditation, and whenever the problem comes to mind: "My God, You are. I know that You will see me through this great trial." God knows your need and nothing is impossible to Him. Faith links your need to His omnipotence.

The second principle is to meditate deeply, and pray for God's guidance and help, as you strive to free yourself from whatever is troubling you. He wants to help you, and when you are receptive, you will be guided by Him.

The third point is surrender. "Lord, let Thy will be done." Surrender to the will of God is essential on the spiritual path. Whatever happens, whether in connection with the body, one's work, or some other interest, pray that God's will be done; because His will is guided by wisdom. We may think that the fulfillment of a particular desire is extremely important to our happiness, but if we only ask God to help us carry out our own wishes, we are not seeing with the eyes of wisdom. We should let Him do with us what He chooses; it will always be for our highest good. After praying for God to

guide us, and striving our very best for the right outcome, we should show God that we accept His will in all things.

The last rule is to relax and let go of the problem. Release it into God's hands. Once you have done your best, refuse to worry about it anymore. It is possible to get so bogged down with work and worries that you can't even sleep. But how relaxed and peaceful the mind becomes when we have placed our burdens on God's shoulders.

These are four ways to help you maintain inner peace and arrive at a deeper relationship with God. They will also enable you to throw out of your mind anything that is troubling you and preventing you from meditating deeply.

Plunge the Mind into Meditation

When you sit to meditate, forget everything else. So train yourself that when it is time for meditation, nothing can distract you. The ability to concentrate deeply comes with regular meditation. In our religious communities no one may excuse himself from the daily periods of meditation; regular attendance is an essential rule. And the reason is that unless a devotee can follow this simple requirement, he will not have the self-discipline necessary to reach his divine goal.

Throughout the day's activities, be watchful that you do not become lost in the mental restlessness of worldliness. Inwardly take the name of God. Strive to keep your mind busy thinking of God. This practice Paramahansaji called "spiritualizing" thought. It is achieved by guiding your thinking. For example, when you have a few free moments, there is no point in being indolent or dwelling upon negation; why not think of God or inwardly converse with Him? His presence is so peaceful, so wonderful! Once you form the habit, you want always to be in that consciousness.

By spiritualizing thought, one gradually spiritualizes his actions, so that everything he does becomes a form of meditation. One's whole life should be a continuous spiritual experience.

Learn to Draw from a Higher Power

The material-minded man is always thinking in terms of money, home, family, or other responsibilities and interests; and the worries that go with them! The spiritual man may have the same responsibilities, but he meets them by putting his mind on a higher level of thought. By spiritualizing his thinking, he learns to draw from a Higher Power. The time comes when he can go anywhere, mix with anyone, fulfill his responsibilities, and his mind never comes down from the plane of God-awareness. Christ many times associated with "publicans and sinners," in order to help them, but their thinking and actions did not lower his consciousness. Like a divine swan, he moved untouched through the waters of materiality. That is the way Gurudeva trained us to be. Wherever you are, remain always centered within, your mind focused on your polestar: God.

The problems that arise every day give us an opportunity to practice even-mindedness. We should welcome them instead of resisting, becoming upset and irritable, and thinking we are not making progress. Remember this: Often the devotee makes the greatest progress on the spiritual path when he is facing tremendous obstacles, when he is being forced to exercise to the limit his spiritual muscles of inner strength, courage, and positive thinking in order to resist the onslaught of negation, evil, or unkindness. It is not always when things are going smoothly that we are growing. We all naturally treasure those days when things go well; but I have prayed many times to Divine Mother (the personal aspect of God, embodying the love and compassionate qualities of a mother) to test me, because I want my love for Her to be unconditional. I cannot be satisfied with giving Her anything less than perfect love. The devotee of God does not wish to run away from anything. The aspirant might be imperfect in many ways; he lays no claim to any perfection except one: he is striving to perfect his love for God.

Don't pay attention to hardships on the spiritual path;

they are nothing once you have discovered the peace within, when in meditation you forget this body and this world. Such satisfaction, such a sense of joy and the perfection of divine love! This is what God wants all of you to experience. Everyone can realize the divine perfection of God's love if he works for it. Those who experience this love are not exceptions; they had to make the effort, as you must, to love God and to know Him.

That effort is made by striving to keep the mind fixed on God. While facing the daily problems that come, pray within, "Lord, though sometimes my sea is dark and my stars are gone, still through Thy mercy I see the path. You do whatever You wish with me and my life. All I know is that I love You. Help me to make my love sweeter for You, perfect in every way." What freedom, what joy that brings! Such a relationship with the Divine all can have.

Don't be satisfied with anything less than the love of the Beloved of your souls. His love is all-consuming, all-satisfying. Soul freedom comes when you begin to know yourself as the soul, wed to the one Beloved, the cosmic divine lover, God.

The Value of Balanced Living

When you spiritualize your thinking, your mind is always immersed in lofty thoughts. That doesn't mean that your feet are not on the ground, or that you neglect your responsibilities. Gurudeva's training sees to that! I am so grateful for the *sādhana* he has given us, which we can practice in the world and in our ashrams and retreats. If we had all fled to mountain peaks, hoping there to find God, what disappointment might have been our destiny! Most seekers do not have the spiritual strength for that life. A guru who is one with God knows what training each disciple needs, and places him where his spiritual unfoldment can best take place.

Think of the great examples of such divine saints as

Theresa of Avila, who was so practical, who founded many convents in spite of great obstacles, and yet was always enraptured with love of God, immersed in His love. And think of the struggles and misunderstandings that came to St. Bernadette. The story of her last moments intoxicates me. Despite all the physical and mental sufferings she was passing through, when she perceived the divine Presence she raised herself up on her bed, whispering, "I love You, I love You, I love You." That to me is perfection. That is the relationship with God I wish for all. And it comes through spiritualizing your thinking by those methods I have explained: faith in God, daily deep prayer and meditation on God, surrender to God's will, and giving your troubles to Him. Isn't that a beautiful philosophy? It is the highest way to live.

After meditating, strive to remain in the state of peace and restfulness felt during meditation. Peace within is the first proof of God's presence. And keeping the mind in that restful state is essential to thinking of God during activity. After meditation, go on recollecting the awareness of God within as long as you can, while you are working, or exercising, or relaxing. The more you do so, the more that state will become natural to you. In truth, it is your natural state of consciousness to live, and move, and have your being in God. But to *realize* this, you must strive to hold on to the joyful, peaceful awareness you experience during meditation.

Gurudeva used to say to us: "Don't let go of it, don't lose it. Rest in that thought, work in that thought, help others in that thought, have all your experiences in life in that peaceful thought of God. Then you are indeed living." Remember that life is a dream. It is not real except as we relate all of our experiences to God. When we meditate deeply we go behind the screen, as Guruji would say, and become aware of the divine Director who is controlling this movie of creation, guiding it and guiding us.

Truth Is Simple

When we brought problems to Paramahansaji there was never a lengthy discussion, just one simple answer: "Keep

your mind on God." How grateful to him I am for those words of wisdom, and for the simplicity of the way he taught us to follow the spiritual path. Because God is simple. Life seems complicated because it is not real; only Truth is simple.

When a person builds his life on a lie, he spends all his time trying to cover up. He weaves a web around himself and then can't extricate himself. But when a person is always truthful, he is direct; there is no complication to his thinking or his life. It is the same way with God. When an individual sincerely seeks God, he finds just a simple, straight path. It is only when you look outward to the world that you see complication. When you look inward to God you see utter simplicity, divine and joyous simplicity. That's what God is. And that is the way you must make your life. Then you will know Him.



VI

God Remembrance

by Swami Ramdas

Beloved Friends, we are all in search of eternal peace and joy, the eternal Kingdom of Heaven. This is our quest. After realizing that supreme state, we become truly free and happy. The divine forces that do good to humanity are hidden in us. They manifest in us when we are in communion with the divine. We are mistaken in thinking that heaven is far away from us. Jesus has categorically told us that the kingdom of heaven is within us. In that heaven God dwells. So He is dwelling within us. If we are conscious of this truth, we can always be happy, free, and cheerful. All our powers revealed through union with the divine can be utilized for the uplift of others in every way. So what we have to do is to pray to God and meditate on Him.

God is seated in our heart. This is the first thing we have to know, the first thing we must believe in. When we do that, the next step is easy. If we feel He is far away from us, we do not derive much benefit by meditating on Him. If we feel that He is within us, and pray to Him in the sanctum of our heart, then we can draw from Him light, grace, power, and peace. When we pray to Him, let us shut our eyes and visualize Him as seated in our heart. Then the prayer will soon be heard. If we think He is far away from us, we may doubt whether our prayer reaches Him. It is easy to commune with Him in the heart, to pray to Him and surrender to Him. By resigning ourselves to His will, we release the divine force within us

that contributes to our happiness and to the happiness of others. When we are conscious of this, we truly love our fellow beings, and by that love we shed on them light, peace, and joy. Our life too becomes blessed that way.

This is not merely a mental exercise, but tuning of our mind with the divine within us through constant remembrance and meditation. For this, Ramdas found that the chanting of the divine name was the easiest way. Many people think that the divine name cannot do anything. If we take the name of God with all faith and devotion we shall find that the mind, which is so restless, becomes perfectly at peace. When the mind is peaceful and still, we realize the existence of God within us. We doubt His very existence because our mind is restless. Our mind is full of outgoing tendencies. It is wishing and making plans all day. So we do not feel God within us, just as in moving and disturbed water we cannot see the reflection of our face. As soon as the water becomes still and waves have stopped, we can see the reflection clearly. So also the mind has to be purified and made still by constant remembrance of God through the utterance of His name, before we can feel His presence. His name is all-powerful.

A Means to Communion

Prayer presupposes a belief in the existence of God. Otherwise we would not pray. We therefore take it for granted even before we have seen God that He does exist. This faith in His existence comes to us from the teachings of saints and sages who have seen Him. Now, taking for granted that God exists, we have next to know where He is. There also the saints have taught us that God dwells within us. The heart is the place in which God resides. Having known where He dwells, we have to see Him and realize Him and live in the light of His guidance. This is possible only by contacting God. That contact is possible only through prayer.

Prayer is a means by which we communicate with Him and establish a relationship with Him. We look upon Him as

father, mother, friend, master, or Lord. We consider ourselves to be His children, servants, or friends. This relationship brings us nearer to Him, and our prayer then becomes very real to us. When we look upon Him as our master, we pray to Him to guide us so that we may always walk on the path of righteousness without going astray. God, who is dwelling within, listens to our prayer, responds to it, and grants us the necessary strength to walk always on the path of Truth. This power we derive by prayer. Prayer should be done with the sole object of attaining the knowledge of our oneness with Him.

The word "knowledge" is rightly used here, because we are ever one with Him, but we do not know this. As we do not know it, we are like children who have missed the mother. Although the mother is with us, if we have closed our eyes, we do not see her. The moment we open our eyes we see the mother. It is not that she came there only when we opened our eyes. She was there even before, but as we had closed our eyes, we could not see her. Similarly we have closed our eyes against God within us. If we open our eyes, we shall see He is there. He has ever been there. We are not conscious of Him, we have forgotten Him, and therefore we feel we are away from Him. It is this sense of separation that makes us miserable and unhappy, and subjects us to worries, cares, and anxieties. The moment we know that God is within us, and that we are always basking in the sunshine of His grace, then we feel supremely happy, like a child that has found the missing mother.

So, prayer enables us to contact God and also to feel His presence within us. As we go on remembering Him through prayer, the intensity of our longing to have Him increases, and we feel His nearness. Our mind becomes purer and purer day by day by means of the prayer and continuous remembrance of Him. When Ramdas was struggling to know God, to realize God, to feel His presence, his one mainstay was God's holy name. He kept this all-powerful Name on his tongue always, and he felt he was very near God, because the

Name gave continuous remembrance, and the remembrance developed into a consciousness in which he felt not only nearness of God, but also oneness with Him. So, Name leads us to Him without any doubt. Prayer and chanting of His name are the two things needed to find Him within us and realize our unity with Him. Ramdas had not done anything else except these two things—prayer and repetition of God's name. Whatever else he did in the way of discipline, such as fasting, going in solitude, or courting the society of saints, it was done with the sole object of keeping up a continuous remembrance of God in his mind. Whenever God-remembrance left him, he used to feel utterly miserable. When the remembrance was there, he was perfectly happy.

The Agony Of Separation

When you have once contacted God and derived the consequent peace and joy, separation from Him becomes unbearable. This has been the experience of all devotees of God who have tried to remember Him and feel His presence always with them. In the early days of our struggle to approach Him, there is what they call "touch and go" going on within us. We find Him for a time and the next moment we miss Him, and we are thrown into a state of agony. This agony makes us pine for Him, and that pining and longing again brings us in contact with Him. It is said that the feeling of the devotee who has missed Him is like the feeling of a fish thrown out of water. As the fish thirsts for water, so the devotee thirsts for God. When this state of things persists, it is easy for us to have continuous remembrance of Him. Even in separation, that intense remembrance will make us conscious of His presence within us and we will have again His union. This agony of separation is called *viraha* in Sanskrit.

We are living in the world and wish that we should have God. But our desire for God is so lukewarm that we do not miss Him at all. We are so much used to forgetting Him that we do not consider that it is a kind of disease in us. Our

normal state is to ever live, move, and have our being in Him. We are living in an abnormal or diseased state. We do not even admit that we are abnormal or diseased. When we come to admit that, we pray day and night for His grace so that we can keep our mind ever in union with Him, through constant remembrance.

Prayer should not be done with a view to get from God any material things. We are more concerned about material things when we pray to God than about the real thing—the union with Him. We ask God for things which are perishable, and which we have to ultimately leave behind when we finish this earthly career. Ramdas remembers in this connection the famous teaching of Jesus Christ, “Seek first the kingdom of heaven and everything else will be added unto you.” What we should have is His grace, so that we can realize our oneness with Him and feel His presence always with us. This should be the sole purpose of our prayer.

God's Assurance

In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, God assures us, “To those men who worship Me alone, thinking of no other, to those ever harmonious, I bring full security.” That means, he who has made God the goal of life and strives to attain Him, and for that purpose remembers Him constantly, him God looks after in every way. Ramdas’ first year’s life, as chronicled in the book *In Quest of God*, was lived by wandering from place to place all over India in a state of complete surrender to God. He had no thought of the body; he had no thought of food; he did not know where to rest. His one thought—and the only thought—was of God. When the tongue was continuously chanting God’s name, his mind was in a state of absorption in the divine. So he was not feeling himself separate from the divine. The world for the time being disappeared from his mind. When thus he wandered all over India, God in a mysterious way looked after him. Therefore the Sanskrit verse, the meaning of which Ramdas told you a few minutes back, is

printed on the front cover page of his book *In Quest of God* as its motto.

This assurance of God has been fully testified and proved to be true in that one year's life, which was only the beginning. Now, of course, it is evident that at every second of his life God is looking after him most tenderly. He has come here all the way, maybe about twelve thousand miles from India. All through the journey, he was looked after by Him most carefully. When he started from India, many friends feared that he would have to undergo great hardships. But God carried out our program so beautifully that he had not to suffer in any way in this long travel.

Therefore it is not proper for us to ask God for any material things, but only for the things of the highest spiritual value, namely the realization of God. God says "Whatever I give you is impermanent. The Eternal is Myself. If you pray that I should be yours, I will become yours." But we do not want Him. We want only the things that He gives, which are perishable. How can we then have eternal peace? Pray to God to become yours, or to make you His. It amounts to the same thing whether you become His, or He becomes yours, as, in either case, you ask for immortality. In immortality there is real joy and peace. There is a prayer among the Hindus, "Lead me, O God, from the unreal to the Real; lead me from darkness to Light; lead me from death to Immortality." This is the right prayer for us all. Thus we shall come by the highest beatitude; we shall enjoy supreme peace here and now.

Different Kinds Of Prayer

We believe that just as food nourishes the body, prayer nourishes the soul. There are some who love God, but they do not love Him so much as they love worldly objects. So they cannot remember God constantly. A man who is attached to wealth cannot be devoted to God. Your love for God should be the greatest. Then alone your mind will be centered in

Him. A devotee, Prahlād, while yet a boy, prayed to God, "Oh God, I do not pray for anything new from you. Let my mind run towards you with the same force as it runs towards the objects of the senses." Only the direction of the mind has to be changed, even as we have to change the course of a stream if its waters are not to be lost in desert sands. If we direct the stream to the fields we can raise good crops by making use of its water. Let the wandering mind be directed to God. Then our life would turn fertile and achieve good and great ideals. Otherwise it would be wasted away.

There are so many struggling to purify their minds, but they do not have any success because they are egoistic. Egoistic struggle does not lead us far. We must bow down before Him, surrender to Him. Say, "O God! I am nothing. You are everything." They say that the best prayer is that which God puts into our mouth. So let Him make us pray to Himself for the right thing. Let us not pray to Him for the things we consider best, but which might prove to be really harmful. There was a poem which Ramdas read many years ago, entitled "Unanswered Prayers." The poet said "O God! My prayer to you is that You should not grant my prayers. In my foolishness I am asking for so many things that may not be good for me. I leave everything to You. You know what is best for me."

The child in its folly asks the mother for a knife to play with. The mother knows the knife would hurt the child and so she does not grant the child's wish. If the child leaves to the mother to do what she likes for him, then she will do the best for him. God is called Providence. He is the provider. He provides us with what we need. We should not ask for material things. Ask Him only to give us true devotion that will ultimately make us realize that we are one with Him.

"First seek the Kingdom of Heaven and everything else will be added unto you." These are the words of Jesus. How true they are! But we are asking for name, fame, power, and we get more and more involved in these worldly things and forget Him. If we leave it to Him, He will give us what is

good. Let us be satisfied with what He gives. Therefore it is said that we should not be discontented with the situations in which He places us. But discontentment there should be for our not having progressed sufficiently on the path and attained the vision of God. Let us only aspire for Him. Let us pray, "O God! Make my mind pure. I have been told by sages that You are within me. But I am not aware of You. Make me aware of You."

Beyond Prayer

In the ashram we repeat God's name and go about doing our work. We must transcend the stage of prayer also. Because utter dependence on God does not admit of any prayer. We live and move in Him. Then why pray to Him? We are completely under His protection and we are aware of it. A child has nothing to pray to its mother when the mother looks after it. The mother knows what is good for the child. . . . We need not pray. We are perfectly confident that He is doing everything for our good. In whatever way He makes us live, we must reconcile ourselves to it, taking it that God has done these things for our good only.

Good and bad are mental attitudes. In the Absolute, that is, in God, there is no evil. We reconcile ourselves to everything that happens in our life, taking them as given to us by God. He is all goodness and mercy. From Him evil cannot come. Evil is of man's own making. Man takes certain situations as evil and suffers. Certain other situations he considers as good and is happy. If we go beyond these dualities, then good and evil have no meaning for us. The same is the case with the so-called loss and gain, success and failure, praise and blame. These terms have no significance for us because we enjoy internal bliss, which is eternal. Why do we care whether the world praises us or not? But the man who clings on to these worldly things wants honor and praise; when he gets them he is happy and when he does not, he is unhappy. His life is like a pendulum moving betwixt a smile and a tear.

Suffering is necessary for spiritual growth just as manure is to plants. Sufferings will later on be transmuted into joy.

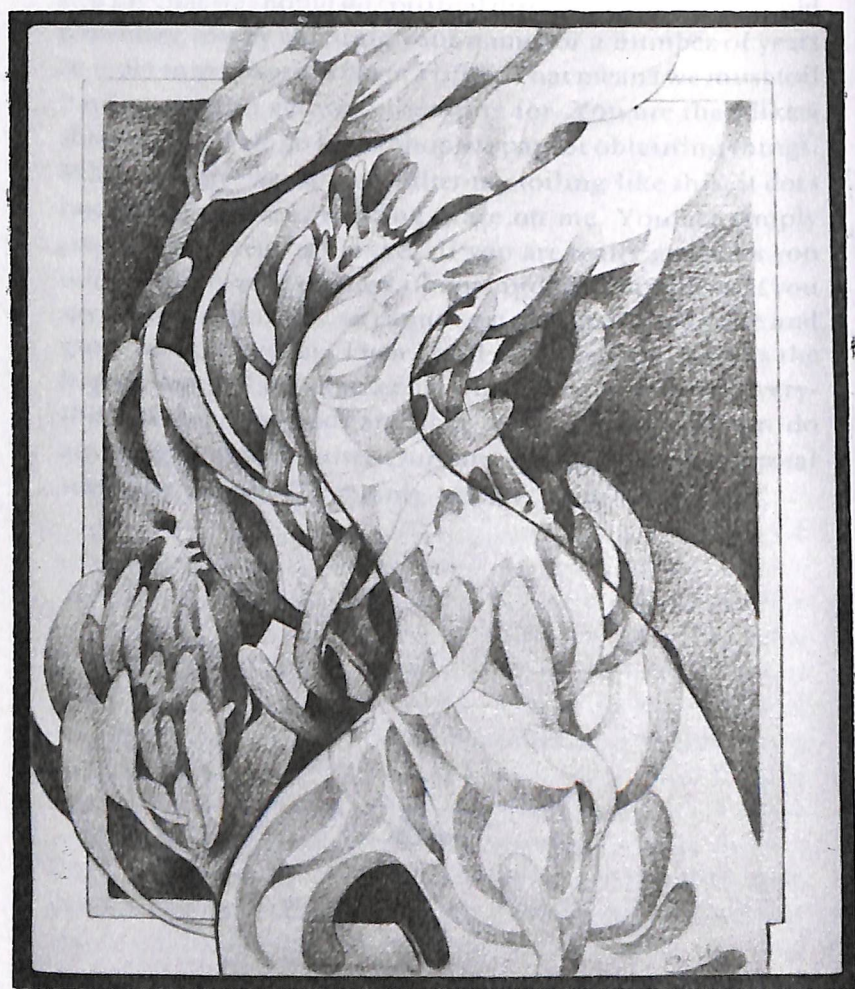
Another devotee prayed in a wonderful way, "Oh God, you say that we should do spiritual discipline, that we should remember you by chanting your name for a number of years in order to get your *darśan* or vision. That means we must toil hard in order to get what we aspire for. You are then like a shopkeeper. If we go to the shop we pay for obtaining things. When you give *darśan* only after my toiling like this, it does not mean you are conferring grace on me. You are simply paying, as it were, my wages. If you are really gracious you must reveal yourself to me without my doing anything. If you say I am not pure and so cannot see you, make me pure and grant me your vision. Then I will call it grace." This is the highest state of the devotee in which he knows that everything is done by God, and that to say he himself can do anything is utterly false. Our struggle must cease in total surrender to Him. Then only we have Him.





find them to us,
to your blessed feet
and get fulfilled.

namah Shivayadiparambha



PART THREE

Joyous Communion

*My thoughts,
flying over the heights of bliss
and the depths of despair,
find their way
to your blessed feet
and get fulfilled.*

Swamini Sharadapriyananda



Buddha's idea is that there is no God, only man himself. He repudiated the mentality which underlies the prevalent ideas of God. He found it made men weak and superstitious. If you pray to God to give you everything, who is it, then, that goes out and works? God comes to those who work hard. God helps those who help themselves. An opposite idea of God weakens our nerves, softens our muscles, makes us dependent. Everything independent is happy; everything dependent is miserable. Man has infinite power within himself and he can realize himself as the one infinite Self. It can be done, but you do not believe it. You pray to God and keep your powder dry all the time.

Buddha taught the opposite. Do not let men weep. Let them have none of this praying and all that. God is not keeping shop. With every breath you are praying in God. I am

developing a Relationship
talking; that is prayer. You are listening; that is prayer. Is there ever any movement of yours, mental or physical, in which you do not participate in the infinite divine Energy? It is all a constant prayer. If you call only a set of words prayer, you make prayer superficial. Such prayers are not much good; they can scarcely bear any real fruit.

Is prayer a magic formula, by repeating which, even if you do not work hard, you gain miraculous results? No. All have to work hard; all have to reach the depths of that infinite Energy. Behind the poor, behind the rich, there is the same infinite Energy. It is not that one man works hard, and another by repeating a few words achieves results. This universe is a constant prayer. If you take prayer in this sense, I am with you. Words are not necessary. Better is silent prayer.

Buddha's Message
by Swami Vivekananda

VII

Developing a Relationship with God

by Swami Chinmayananda

In the early stages of evolution man worshipped trees, animals, and the departed ones, as can be seen even today among the tribal civilizations. As man grew under the pressure of his needs and the visions of his intellect, he came to make his gods out of stone, clay, wood, or metal. Idol worship then started. Even here, at the earliest stages of his history, man seems to have worshipped his god as Mother. In this Divine Mother concept, the goddess is supposed to love Her children just because they are Her children and for no other reason. The divine Mother is all-loving, and whatever we might do, we have only to cry out for Her and She is supposed to forgive everything and gather us into Her protective, nourishing bosom.

From these mother-centered days, religion slowly moved to the father-centered attitude, wherein God was considered as a strict, but kind, father. He expects us to obey His laws, to live as His "image," and to fulfill what He expects of us. In case of default in any of His expectations, He inflicts severe punishment; but if we are obedient and industrious, humble and productive, He makes us His successors!

In general, most religions are now at this stage. Yet, it must be admitted that the concept of God as the supreme mother will never leave the world as long as man craves for the mother's unquestioning and all-giving love.

Thus there was a movement from the matriarchal to the patriarchal view in religion. Even in patriarchal religion, as man grew up into a fuller awareness of his own independent and separate existence and as he explored more of his own capacities in the consciousness of his fuller stature, his concept of God also gradually changed. From that of the unrelenting disciplinarian, the concept of the Lord evolved into a divine Power of absolute mercy, love, and justice.

This growth corresponds to the growth of the child into his adolescence, and from the adolescent stage, with its fears of authority-figures, his growth into the responsible status of young adulthood, when he matures and recognizes the reasonableness of his father's authority, the blessings of his rules, and the justice of his laws. He is now able to recognize the anxious, loving, dedicated benefactor in his apparently fierce father.

The final stage is when the youthful man grows into full maturity, and the son comes to feel his intimate identity with his father. Religion at its highest recognizes this noble relationship between the devotee and the Lord—a relationship of agreement, a sense of supreme nearness. Ultimately he discovers his total identity with the Lord—the one infinite Reality, the Self in All.

This is not a mere hypothesis or an idle supposition. According to the type of people that constitute a given community at any given era of history, these different types of relationships between man and God are found emphasized. Śrī Madhvācārya emphasized the view that the devotee and the Lord are ever separate—the *Dvaita* philosophy.

Śrī Rāmānujācārya declared that man is not totally different from the Lord, but that he and his Lord have a part-and-whole relationship. The Lord is the whole while the devotee is a part of Him—the *Viśiṣṭādvaita* philosophy.

According to Ācārya Śaṅkara, identification is the measuring rod of *bhakti*. When identification is complete, love is fulfilled. On identification of the ego—and all its weaknesses, imperfections, and limitations—with the absolute Reality, Perfection or Bliss or supreme Knowledge is achieved. Through a constant remembrance of the nature of the Self, the finite ego gets released from its false notions of limitations, and discovers itself to be nothing other than the Supreme. In this Self-discovery it experiences complete identification with the Self. Then alone is *bhakti* entirely fulfilled. To live as the Self and to meet others in life while standing upon this solid foundation of the true nature of the Self is the culmination of knowledge, and this is termed by Ācārya Śaṅkara as *bhakti*. He defines *bhakti* as the means and the end, where love and knowledge merge together to become the Experience-Divine.

Among the instruments and conditions necessary for liberation, bhakti alone is supreme. A constant attempt to live up to one's own real nature is called single-pointed devotion (Vivekacūdāmaṇi, verse 31).

Ācārya Śaṅkara says the *bhakti* is the path, but he adds a codicil explaining the term *bhakti*. According to him, *bhakti* is not a practice of beggary at the feet of the Lord, but is a constant and consistent effort at raising the ego-center from the welter of its false values to the knowledge of the Self.

Offering up One's Anxieties

No worry or anxiety should be entertained at the worldly losses, as it is the nature of a true devotee to surrender constantly his limited self and all its secular and sacred activities to the Lord of his heart (Nārada Bhakti Sūtra VI:2:61).

“Never entertain anxiety.” “Don’t worry.” “Never mind whatever happens”—this is the attitude that a true seeker

should cherish, explains the sage Nārada. There is the Lord; He is the Reality. All these worries and anxieties are only mere bubbles—even their threats and daggers are from the All-loving Lord alone—somehow hold on!

The cardinal attitude of heroism in Vedānta is "Refuse to weep; keep smiling." Then even the sorrow that reaches you gets ashamed and retires in its incompetency to make you suffer. It has to go away; it cannot stand against such a heroic heart.

"O Lord, this is all your *Māyā* only. O beloved, I know You are just behind this very sorrow I am now facing"—this is the attitude of a true devotee in all his experiences, good or bad; and true enough, just behind the experiences is ever the Consciousness divine, the effulgent One, constantly beaming forth Its irrepressible glory.

"Apart from Him, I don't exist," declares the devotee of the Lord. "Everything of me is already laid at the feet of the Lord. I do not exist, so I cannot worry about anything. It is all now His worry. I am but the 'witness' of the sorrow; as such the sorrow itself cannot be mine." Constantly the *bhakta* lives in this attitude, dedicating himself, the world, the Vedas, and everything to the Lord.

By this attitude, the *bhakta* cultivates in himself the spirit of renunciation, the joy of surrender, and the constant sense of self-offering. To give is ever the expression of love. Love is measured by the very joy of sacrifice—of giving one's self and one's all to Him, the Beloved. How can one take back what has already been offered in love? When one's anxieties have been offered, whose worries are these? When one's self has been offered, who then exists to worry? "O Lord, it is all yours."

Living and Growing in God

In the world we find that some of us are in unhappy circumstances while some of us are in relatively happy surroundings. Joy and sorrow pass across our life's paths, creating endless situations. A true devotee never allows his mind

to worry over them. For the *bhakta* (devotee) who has already surrendered himself and all his profits, losses, successes, failures,—in short, everything—unto the Lord, anxiety cannot exist. But as long as this great Reality has not been apprehended or such an all-consuming devotion has not developed, our worldly duties are not to be given up. It was on this principle that Lord Kṛṣṇa did not allow Arjuna to leave the field of his action.

As long as we are seekers (*sādhakas*) cultivating and developing devotion to the highest, worldly activities constituted of material activities, our duties toward home, society, and nation, should not be given up. Until one reaches the highest, one must continue the dynamic life of activities, fulfilling one's duties and responsibilities. As long as we are practicing, we must live fully the life of responsibilities provided for us by the Lord. Nothing need be renounced. Each should pursue his life in the field where the Lord has placed him, because the Omniscient One knows exactly what is needed for our own inner unfoldment. It is for the exhaustion of the existing *vāsanās* in us that we have been given these equipments, and we are placed in the right type of environment. It is useless to protest or weep about it. It is for the doctor to decide if the patient should be admitted into a hospital and what kind of treatment he should undergo. Therefore, the advice of Śrī Nārada is:

Until a consummate love is gained (or even after attaining the consummate love), worldly activities are not to be abandoned. Certainly we must diligently pursue love and learn to renounce our anxiety to enjoy the fruit of our actions (VI:2:62).

So then, are we to continue living the same wretched life that we are now living—with a mere added prayer on our lips? No. Since we have started sincerely cultivating devotion for the Lord, whose expression is this entire world around us, we will, with joy, continue to go to our fields of activity, but

with a difference: our attitude to our work is now totally transformed. Now that we are constantly thinking of Him and habitually surrendering everything to our beloved Divine, it becomes easy for us to renounce the anxiety for the enjoyment of the fruits of our actions. We must do our best to fulfill our duties in whatever field He places us. For as we act on, we now recognize the field of action—nay, the whole world—as the Lord Himself in another form. Our work then becomes our worship of Him who is the Self in us.

Constantly the devotee's mind turns more and more toward the Lord as he learns to withdraw himself from the sense-appetites and the anxiety to hoard. Simultaneous with the change in the inner attitude, the devotee's daily *sādhana* deepens in ardor, broadens in love, expands to touch new realms of spiritual experiences. He finds greater pleasure in his daily prayers, and gradually he comes to understand that the very environment wherein the Lord has placed him is the most conducive one for him to grow, and that it is most necessary and almost unavoidable for his development. Therefore joyously the true devotee goes through the muddy pools of life constantly remembering Him—and waiting eagerly for the day when he would be leaving the “hospital”—the life in the field of plurality.

When an aspirant has not yet attained pure love, a cheerful life of selfless activities dedicated to God should be the *sādhana*. One must learn to detect the ego whenever it rises and surrender it unto the Lord, renounce all anxieties for the fruits-of-action, and act on sincerely with all one's heart, with a serene mind, and with complete dedication—wherever one has been placed.

Even those who have already gained the highest devotion should not give up their duties, but thereafter their obligation should be not to their home, but to spreading the culture, whereby their own perfect living will uphold the spiritual ideologies. When a Self-realized person is working in the world, he will have no anxiety for the results, for he is not working for glory, achievement, or success. He is not

concerned whether his work is appreciated or recognized by others. The fruits-of-action belong to the Lord.

The life of such a selfless seeker becomes a life of *sādhana*. He should not give up the spiritual practices he observed before he gained his devotion. He should continue them as vigorously as before. There is always the risk that if he overlooks them when he is dealing with the world, *Māyā* might encumber him once again with its limitations, or at least, it will try to dim his vision of the Reality. Therefore the advice to all sincere seekers is:

Virtues, like ahimsa (non-injury to others), truthfulness, cleanliness, compassion, and faith in the Lord should be consistently cultivated (VIII:2:78).

It is a law that one can never unfold and develop spiritually if one's conduct is bad. Even *sādhana* is impossible for such an individual. Virtues such as non-violence, compassion, faith in the Lord and in the existence of a higher Truth, and righteous behavior must be scrupulously observed and cultivated.

To come to live a virtuous life is to study the scriptures regularly and reflect deeply upon what is righteousness, so that our belief and faith may deepen and we may come to live up to it and experience it more and more. Such a total involvement in the higher way of life is true spiritual pursuit and evolutionary living.

The Four Conditions of Prayer

While thus cultivating the spiritual beauties in one's personality, unintentionally some people find themselves empty, exhausted, sunk back again into their crude animal urges. Such falls happen to the mind when it loses its firm hold on His feet and consequently gets dragged into the swirl of *saṁsāra*.

Hence sage Nārada, the immortal preacher of devotion,

advises us in the following verse, giving us the entire essence of all *sādhana*s, as it were:

*Always, free from all mental anxiety, the
Lord alone is to be invoked and sought after,
with all factors of our personality (VIII:2:79).*

Always, at all times, in all conditions, in all places, with all one's heart, in perfect devotion, let the Lord be worshipped quietly, serenely, and with a composed mind by those who have given up all worries and anxieties. This is Śrī Nārada's advice to seekers.

Go in full surrender unto Him. Invoke Him. But there are four conditions to be scrupulously practiced: (1) at all times, (2) in all conditions, (3) in calmness and serenity, (4) as the sole source of your seeking.

Even today many of us pray, but it is only a prayer of the ego, "I, I, I"—a worship of the perceiver-feeler-thinker "I"—so naturally, instead of becoming calmer in mind, we are ever in agitation, continuously persecuted by our own mind with its endless hungers and demands.

The seeker who understands this will not say that these four conditions of *sādhana* are very difficult. He will only have to redirect his present preoccupation which keeps his mind distracted in a thousand channels, agitations, worries, and sorrows. From the attitude of constant adoration of the body and the ego, the seeker must take on a spirit of surrender to and worship of the Lord. This capacity to invoke (*bhajana*) is already in each one of us, but we are misusing it. We unintelligently employ it for achieving the wrong ends in the lower fields of sense pleasures. Rightly used and properly employed, the powers of invocation can lift us to the higher, and we can thereby reach the Infinite Truth, the Lord.

Prayer or invocation should be from all the levels of our personality. It must be an outpouring of all our faculties in glorifying Him who dwells in us. At the physical, mental, and intellectual levels we must be able to put forth all the best in us as an offering unto Him, in the service of all around us,

at all times. Let our actions sing His glory. Let our feelings waft the fragrance of His eternal purity. Let our thoughts gurgle out, expressing His dynamism and divine will. Such a total God-centered life itself is a true hymn in praise of the Lord. Let our life be a devotional song, sung in praise of Him who is ever in our heart.

Transformation of the Devotee

When the whole being of the devotee exposes itself in ardent invocation of Him, the *bhakta*, through such intense association with the Infinite, is gradually transformed to discover that he has attained the very divine attributes he is worshipping.

*When invoked, He indeed reveals Himself
and makes the devotee realize His absolute
nature divine (IX:1:80).*

When we worship the Lord, invoking Him by our constant contemplation upon His glories, our mind is cut loose from its fanciful attachments to the pluralistic world. When the mind is turned toward the Higher through our earnest identification with His glories, the Truth that is already within us unveils and reveals Itself.

Truth is not anything separate from us—it is already present as the Illuminator behind every thought in us. Ere long, indeed, very quickly, as soon as the mind is hushed, Truth is uncovered, just like a lost key, having been long sought for in futile excitement, is at last discovered in one's own pocket. The key was already there, but not being aware of its presence the owner searched in vain everywhere. Truth was with us all the time, but we did not know it, and when we invoke It, we experience It as a divine revelation.

The Self is ever with us, but because It is veiled from our direct perception we do not apprehend It. Apprehension of the Truth takes no time; the Self is revealed immediately when the nonapprehension is removed. Turning our mind toward Him through constant contemplation of His glories

will lead us to apprehend the Reality, the Lord.

It is the Lord Himself who gives His faithful devotee the experience of this absolute, unchanging Truth. The devotee cannot say "I know God," or "I saw God," for Reality is beyond the triple distinctions of experiencer, experienced, and experiencing. At that stage there is no instrument for us to perceive or feel or think of Him! The knower, the known, and the knowing are all merged into One, the pure Consciousness.

When the equipments are transcended, there is no instrument with which to know. Then how does one understand Reality? The Lord, out of His own compassion, makes the devotee experience Him. To realize is not the seeker's responsibility—his is only to experience. Eating is our job; to remove the hunger is the Lord's work.

Even in the world outside, an object may sometimes be veiled from our perception when there are unfavorable conditions for its perception. In order to hear a sound, the sound produced must be of the right frequency, and the sound waves must reach the ear drum of the listener. Similarly, an object may be in front of the eyes, but it must be bathed in a beam of light before the eyes can perceive it.

The Self that already exists in us, now hidden behind conditions unfavorable for its cognition, gets unveiled when these unfavorable conditions are removed. The negative atmosphere in us that screens the Self is called "the darkness (*tamas*) born of ignorance." Even in the darkness of ignorance the Self abides; only it is not available for our intimate, subjective experience. When a seeker has established himself in the above-mentioned constant invocation of the Supreme, he becomes fit for the final experience of his real identity with the Self.

When a seeker succeeds in removing the veils of ignorance, which are nothing but his mental agitations caused by the cloudiness of his intellect, the self-effulgent Self then spontaneously reveals Itself. It comes not as a result of deliberate action, but as a spontaneous revelation, as though by the intervention of divine Grace.

The Power of Invocation

When ignorance is destroyed by Self-knowledge, the Self stands revealed in Its own glory as One-without-a-second, all-pervading and all-full. This act of Self-revelation is undertaken and performed by the Lord, the Self, who ever abides in the heart of His devotees. This kindly act of revealing the Self is undertaken in a spirit of compassion—in fact, toward Itself. When I am tired of walking during my pilgrimage, I may sit on the roadside stone to rest, out of compassion for myself.

This compassion cannot be directly invoked unless the seeker pays the price for it. In daytime when I open the windows of my room, the sunlight, “out of compassion,” illumines the room for me. We know that the sunlight has neither the freedom to withdraw this compassion as long as the windows are open, nor has it the ability to show its compassion before the windows are opened. In short, the sunlight is “invoked” the moment the obstruction is removed.

Just as darkness is instantaneously removed by light—however old the darkness might be and however thick its density—so also in one who gains knowledge of the Self, beginningless ignorance (*avidyā*) is at once lifted, and within a lightning flash it ends. When ignorance is ended there is the immediate apprehension of Truth, the supreme *Brahman*.

*To those whose ignorance has been destroyed
by the knowledge of the Self, knowledge like
the sun reveals the Supreme (Bhagavad Gītā
V:16).*

When a dreamer wakes up he ends his dream personality and discovers himself to be the waker. The waker is never considered an object attained by the dreamer on his waking. The dreamer himself transcends the dream world and enters the realm of the waking, wherein he knows himself to be the waker. In the same way, when the deluded ego walks out of ignorance and enters the realm of pure Consciousness, it

becomes that Consciousness, which is the Self (*Ātman*). This relationship between the ego and the *Ātman* and the technique of rediscovery of the *Ātman* by the ego are beautifully described by the example given in this verse. Generally students fail to understand how the Self can be experienced when the experiencer, the ego, and the instruments of experiencing have all ended.

Foreseeing this possibility, Lord Kṛṣṇa tries to explain here how, when the ego has ended, knowledge becomes self-evident, by the example given in the second line of the verse: "like the sun." To see the sun we need no other light; to experience the Self we need no other experience. The Self is Awareness. It is Consciousness. To become conscious of Consciousness, we need no separate consciousness; to know knowledge we need no knowledge other than knowledge; knowledge is the very faculty of knowing. Similarly, when the ego rediscovers the Self, it becomes the Self.



VIII

Interior Prayer

*from The Way of a Pilgrim
and The Pilgrim Continues His Way*

"It is more necessary to learn to call on the name of God than it is to breathe. The Apostle Paul says that we are to pray without ceasing and by this he means that man is to remember God at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances. If you are making something, you should remember the Creator of all things; if you see light, you should remember Him who gave it to you; if you see the heavens, the earth, and sea and all that is in them, you should marvel and praise God who called them all into being; if you are clothing yourself, remember the blessings of your Creator and praise Him for being concerned about your well-being. In short, every action of every day should cause you to remember and praise God, and if you do this, then you will be praying ceaselessly and your soul will always be joyful." (Peter Damascene, from the *Philokalia*.)



St. Simeon the New Theologian on Prayer of the Heart

Interior prayer is truly marvelous but it is difficult to explain. For those without practical experience it seems not only incomprehensible but incredible. In fact, this form of

prayer is very rare in our times because the snares of the devil entrap man in all forms of distraction and pure prayer can only be offered to God when the mind is free from all distracting thoughts.

The following conditions are necessary for success in this form of prayer: perfect obedience; guarding the purity of one's conscience in regard to God, to neighbor, and to objects; and a resolve to walk in the presence of God. If you proceed in this manner, you will prepare for yourself a direct path for interior prayer.

Your mind should guard your heart in time of prayer; the mind should constantly descend into the heart and from the depths of the heart offer up prayer to God.

You should do all this until such time as you taste the sweetness of the Lord. When finally the mind is in the heart and it tastes how sweet the Lord is, then it will not wish to leave the heart but will say with St. Peter, "Lord, it is wonderful for us to be here" (Matt. 17:4); then the mind will constantly look into the heart, and if it wanders, it will return there again and again and will repel the thoughts brought by the devil.

For those who have no knowledge and understanding of this inner activity it will seem difficult and oppressive. But those who have tasted the sweetness of the Lord in prayer will cry with St. Paul, "Nothing therefore can come between us and the love of Christ" (Rom. 8:35). . . .

If you wish to learn how to descend into the heart and remain there I will tell you.

First you must observe the following three conditions: You must be free from all cares, not only from vain and unholy cares but even from good things. In other words, you should be dead to everything; your conscience should be pure and it should not denounce you in anything. You should be completely free from passionate attachments; your thoughts should not be inclined toward anything worldly. Then sit alone in a quiet place, close the door, take your mind from every temporal and vain thing, bow your head toward your

chest and stay attentively inside of yourself, not in the head but in the heart, and holding the mind there with your inner eyes watch your breathing. With your mind find the place of the heart and let it abide there. In the beginning you will experience darkness and discomfort, but if you will continue this activity of attention without interruption, you will attain unceasing joy. If the mind continues with this activity, it will find the place of the heart and will see things it never knew and saw before. Then, no matter what distracting thoughts might come, it will immediately repel and destroy them through the name of Jesus. From this time also the mind will experience anger toward the demons and will pursue and overcome them. In addition what usually follows from this you will learn by experience if with the help of God you will guard your attention and keep your mind on the prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me!"

St. Gregory of Sinai on Actualization of God's Presence

Having received the spirit of Jesus Christ by means of a pure prayer of the heart, we should communicate mystically with the Lord. But not understanding the greatness, honor, and glory resulting from grace and not caring about our spiritual growth through the keeping of the commandments and reaching true contemplation, we are careless and therefore fall into sensual habits and we throw ourselves into the abyss of insensitivity and darkness. It happens also that we think very little of God's presence and do not realize that we should be as rays of grace. We believe but not with a living faith, and despite the new spirit which we have received in baptism, we do not cease to live according to the flesh. If we do repent and begin to keep the commandments, we keep only the letter of the law and not the spirit and we are so alienated from spiritual life that even when we see it in others we imagine it as error and confusion. In this way we are dead in the spirit, alive but not in accordance with the conviction that what is born of the spirit should be spiritual.

However, what we have received in holy baptism of the life of Jesus Christ is not destroyed but is only buried as some treasure in the earth. But wisdom and grace demand a concern about this in order to reveal it and bring it into the open. But how?

Two methods can lead us to this actualization: In the first place, this gift is open to the one who keeps the commandments; and to the degree that we keep the commandments, we experience light and wisdom. In the second place, the method by which we can acquire this gift is ceaseless calling on the Lord Jesus or constant awareness of God's presence. The first means is powerful, but the second is even more powerful and it supports the first. Therefore, if we sincerely wish to reveal the abundance of grace buried in us, we will hasten to acquire the habit of the second method, the prayer of the heart, and we will practice this imageless activity until it warms our heart and enflames it to unspeakable love for the Lord.

The action of this prayer in the heart can be present in two ways: Sometimes the mind anticipates and attaches itself to the Lord in the heart by continual remembrance; at other times the prayer comes first in sparks of joy, attracts the mind to the heart, and binds it to call on the Lord Jesus in reverential presence before Him. In the first case the action of the prayer can be noticed in the subduing of the passions through the keeping of the commandments and the warmth of the heart which results from diligently calling on the Lord Jesus; in the second case the spirit attracts the mind to the heart and holds it there in the depths, keeping it from its usual wandering. From these two aspects of prayer the mind is either active or contemplative; when active it overcomes the passions with the help of God, and when contemplative it sees God as much as it is possible for a man to do.

The active prayer of the heart and mind can be accomplished in the following way: Sitting on a chair, bring your mind from the head into the heart and hold it there; from there call with your mind and heart, "Lord Jesus Christ, have

mercy on me!" Regulate your breathing also, because rhythmic breathing can disperse distracting thoughts. When you are aware of thoughts, do not pay attention to them regardless of whether they are good or not. With your mind enter the heart and call on the Lord Jesus often and patiently and in this way you will soon overwhelm and destroy these thoughts through God's name. St. John Climacus says that with the name of Jesus you can destroy the enemy, for a more powerful weapon does not exist either in heaven or on earth.

When the mind becomes exhausted by such effort and the body and heart are weak from frequent calling on the Lord Jesus, you can stand and sing or you can think about some passage from Scripture or about death, or you can read, do manual work, or do some other thing.

When you take upon yourself this activity of prayer, then you should read only those books which contain teachings about interior life, about temperance and prayer, namely the works of John Climacus, Isaac of Syria, the ascetical books of Maxim the Confessor, Simeon the New Theologian, Hesychius, Philotheus of Sinai, and other similar writings. Leave the writings about other matters for a while, not because they are not good but because they are not appropriate to study when you aspire to keep your mind on prayer. Read only a little but deeply and try to assimilate what you read.

Do not abandon prayer books. Some people hold on to many methods of prayer found in prayer books while others give up prayer books completely and concentrate only on mental prayer. You should take the middle road: Do not say many prayers because you will be exhausted; but do not give them up altogether because of infirmity and weakness. If you see that the prayer is active in you and its movement does not cease in your heart, do not leave it and take a prayer book. This would be the same as if you left God in the depths of your heart and then tried to converse with him from the outside. For those who do not yet have self-activating prayer it is necessary to say many words, even without measure, in order to be in this prayerful atmosphere unceasingly until

such an intense prayerful effort inflames the heart and begins self-activating prayer. He who finally tastes this sweetness should then shorten his active prayer and concentrate more on mental prayer as the Fathers suggest. When you become interiorly weak, it is necessary to pray actively or to read the writings of the Fathers. Oars are not necessary when the winds keep the boat in full sail; they are needed when the wind subsides and leaves the boat.

A spirit of contrition is a great weapon against the enemy so that one does not give in to conceit because of the consolations received in prayer. He who guards the spirit of contrition avoids all manner of difficulties. Real and not imagined interior prayer is that in which the warmth from the prayer of Jesus comes, brings fire to the sphere of the heart, and burns the passions like weeds. It consoles the soul with joy and peace and comes not from the left or from the right or from on high but proceeds from the heart as the source of living water of the life-giving Spirit. Aspire to keep this Spirit in your heart by always guarding the mind from images. When united to the Spirit do not be afraid of anything, because He who said, "Courage, it is I, do not be afraid," is Himself with you.

Barsanuphius and John

Remember that God knows the hearts of men and looks into them, so call on Him in your heart. This is what is meant in Scripture; "But when you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place" (Matt. 6:6). Let us close our lips and pray to Him in our heart, because he who closes his lips and calls on God, or prays to Him in his heart, is the one who fulfills the commandment of the Lord.

The effort of your heart should consist in this, to pray unceasingly to God. If you wish to succeed in this, then begin to strive earnestly and in hope and God will bless you with success.

Ceaseless calling on God's name is a medicine which

destroys not only the passions but also their activity. As a doctor finds the right medicine or a bandage for a wound and these help though the sick man does not know how, the same is true with God, for when He is called upon, He annihilates all passions though we do not know how.

The Lord said, "Ask, and it will be given to you" (Luke 11:9). Pray to the all-good God that He send you the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, and He will teach you everything and will reveal all mysteries to you. Take Him as your leader and He will not allow deception to enter your heart; he will dispel distraction, negligence, and drowsiness in your mind. He will enlighten your eyes, strengthen your heart, and raise your mind. Cling to Him, believe in Him, and love Him.

Abba Philemon

By means of silence you can thoroughly cleanse your mind and give it constant spiritual occupation. As the eye on sensory objects looks closely at what it sees, so a pure mind turned toward spiritual things is uplifted by the object of its contemplation. The mind becomes perfect when it enters into the sphere of essential knowledge and is united with God. Having thus attained kingly rank, the mind is no longer poor and it is not carried away by false desires, even if all the kingdoms of the world were offered to it.

Above all, strive to guard your mind and practice recollection; be patient in difficult circumstances and try at all costs to preserve the spiritual blessings which you have acquired. Be attentive and diligent and do not give in to lusts which secretly try to steal in. For although silence tames the passions of the soul, if they are allowed to flare up and become acute they can lead you into sin.

Even when satisfying your most urgent needs, do not allow your mind to be idle but compel it to continue secretly to learn and to pray. In this way you will be able to understand the depth of the divine Scripture and the power which is concealed in it.

IX

*Devotion to God**by Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati*

A spiritual man is one who lives his days in contemplation of God. What is God? In every religion God is referred to as the creator. He is spoken of as the *kartā*. He is said to be responsible for the creation of the world and its maintenance. Every effect must have a cause. The ultimate cause is God. Further, God is the dispenser of the fruits of our actions, whether they are good or evil. God is known as the *karmaphaladātā*, the Giver of the fruits of actions.

Anchoring the Mind

God may be the creator of the world and also the dispenser of the fruits of our actions, but why should we have devotion to Him? Why should we show *bhakti* (devotion) to Him? The answer to this question is provided in the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patāñjali. *Yoga* is defined as *chittavṛttinirodha*—control of the mind's activity. But how to control the mind? This can be brought about by worship of God. The world is full of things that distract the mind, that make it shake and waver. To keep our body in balance without being tossed about, we hold fast to a strong pillar. Even so, to keep our mind steady we should make it stick to something that is unchanging and unshakable. It must be something that is fixed, *sthānu*, permanent among the unstable things of the world. God, who is the all-knowing Intelligence, is the one

Permanent in this world of impermanent things. We should hold Him before our mind to control it and steady it like a flame in a place where there is no breeze.

If one meditates on an object with concentration, one acquires its qualities, and, at last, becomes that thing itself. Meditation on God, who is omniscient, who is unaffected by want, and unmoved by desire, makes one become like God Himself. To steady oneself even as God is steady, one should have devotion to God. Saint Tiruvalluvar says that one must attach oneself to Him who has no attachments in order to rid oneself of all attachments. Attach yourself to God to be detached from all the world.

What really is the core of *bhakti*? It is the condition of mind which is continuously drawn to and anchored in the feet of the Lord of all creatures, the *Paśupati*. Śrī Śaṅkara has written a verse that brings out the nature of *bhakti* with a few beautiful examples from nature and human relations.

Ankolam nijabījaśantatiḥ. It is traditionally believed that there is a tree called the *ankola* tree. Its seeds fall down from the full-grown tree. By some internal compulsion of its nature, it moves of its own accord toward the foot of the parent tree. Having reached the parent tree, the sprouts from the seeds gently ascend, clinging to the trunk, and eventually *become one with it*.

Ayaskāntopalam śūcikā. The needle is drawn to the loadstone, gets magnetized by it, and *becomes itself a magnet*.

Sādhvī naijavibhum. A *pativratā* woman intensely longs with all her heart and soul for the company of her lord, her husband, *who is all the world to her*.

Latā kṣītiruham. A creeper meandering on the ground is on the lookout for a tree to twine itself around. Having found it, *the creeper envelopes the tree* on all sides and cannot be separated from it even with great force.

Sindhussaridvallabham. The rivers that take rise in distant mountains rush forth with turbulent avidity to flow into the sea. The rivers *become one with the waters of the sea* and their water becomes salty just as the sea water is salty.

The attraction in all these cases is natural and spontane-

ous, not a calculated or artificial one. At the start they feel separate from that to which each of them is attracted. But they cannot subsist in their separation. The seed, the needle, the *sādhvī*, the creeper, and the rivers find the fulfillment of their existence in the *union* and, eventually, in their *identity* with that which alone makes for their completion. To the *sādhvī*, the *pativratā*, the true wife, her husband is her all. He is her very life. Separation from him even for a second causes her intense anguish. The rivers rise on mountain tops, where clouds pour out what they took out from the sea, their original source and the ultimate goal. They flow in torrents and fall in cascades, roaring with fury, betokening their eagerness to meet their lord, the *saridvallabha*, and then they *merge in its bosom*.

In these successive ways the true devotee pines for God and draws himself to Him. The final example illustrates the intense thoroughness of devotional attraction, with the background of the ultimate Advaitic (nondual) truth. Devotion is the link between the devotee and deity. The devotee is unhappy in separation from God. He longs for union with the supreme Being. Separation signifies duality, *dvaitabhāva*. The goal of *bhakti* is the annulment of duality and the attainment of oneness, *advaitabhāva*. The *ankola* seed becomes one with the tree, indistinguishable from it. The creeper twines around the tree for the rest of its life. The needle having been magnetized, itself becomes a magnet. The *sādhvī* loses her separate individuality in the personality of her *pati*, her lord. All the rivers of different names and forms lose their distinctness when they become one with the sea. What was the river water becomes the sea water.

Seeking God, Our Sanctuary

These examples also show that God is our source and our sanctuary. Ultimately, being oneself is to realize one's true Self, which is God. That is the consummation of *bhakti*. True prayer is not asking for this and that which are alien to us, which are things outside of us. The true devotee prays to

God to give Himself to himself. "Give me my own nature" *madīyam eva svarūpam dehi*. In the last analysis, since each man's true nature is God Himself, "Give me to myself" means "give Thyself to me."

This truth is wonderfully brought out in another prayer that Śrī Śaṅkara sang in his *Saundaryalahari*. The prayer starts with the words:

Bhavāni tvam dāse mayi vitara dṛṣṭim sakarunam.

Addressing the Mother of the universe as *Bhavāni*, Śrī Śaṅkara prays: "Be pleased to cast Thy gracious look on me, Thy servant." The interesting words here are, "*Bhavāni tvam*," which mean "O *Bhavāni*! Thou (mayest be pleased to shed Thy gracious look on me)." Here, *Bhavāni* is the vocative case; it apostrophizes the Supreme Mother with one of Her names. "*Tvam*" means "Thou" and in the sentence functions as the grammatical subject of what is to follow. But *Bhavāni* is also a verb in the first person singular future tense which means "may I become" and "*tvam*" means "Thou." The first two words of the prayer can also mean "May I become Thou." Śrī Śaṅkara says that as soon as the Supreme Mother hears these first two words of Her devotee's prayer, without waiting for what was to follow she immediately (*tadaiva*) bestows on him identity with Herself, *nijasāyujyapadaṁ*. Giving up the duality consciousness (*dvaitabhāva*) of a servant (*dāsa*), the devotee attains the Advaita stage of oneness with the Supreme. That is the ultimate goal of *bhakti*.

One way of worshipping God is to consider our body as the temple of God and whatever we do as worship of God. In another prayer, one addressed to Śiva, Śrī Śaṅkara bids us think as follows in relation to Śiva:

My inner *Ātman* is Thou alone. My *buddhi* is
Thy consort. My *prāṇas* are Thy companions.
My body is Thy temple. The way in which I
enjoy the things of the senses is Thy worship.
My sleep is *samādhic* contemplation of Thee;
My wanderings are the circumambulation of
Thee.

All that I talk is praise of Thee.

Whatever I do is worship of Thee.

If a man leads his life with this prayer in his mind, there will be no evil in his thought, speech, or action and he will live a pure and dedicated life.

Thus, due discharge of the duties enjoined by the *śāstras* and continuous contemplative devotion to God are the means to evoke God's grace for making our lives fruitful of the highest spirituality.

Praying for Purity

Prayer is an important element of *bhakti*. The purpose of prayer is not to petition for benefits. Need we tell God to give us what we want? Being omniscient, does He not know what we want? Or, does He wait to be approached and petitioned to? To believe that God does not know or waits to be told will detract from His omniscience and His mercy.

But then why do we petition in prayer? Neelakantha Deekshita said, addressing Goddess Minākṣī at Madurai:

"Am I going to tell You what You do not know?

Yet if what must be told is left unsaid, the affliction in the heart will remain unhealed.

So, give ear to what I say."

The purpose of prayer is to find relief from the heartaches of life by communicating with One who will give ear to what is said and who alone can heal the sorrows.

For what should we pray to God? We may have all the goods of the world; but none of them will give us satisfaction if the mind is not at peace. We must pray for freedom from distraction. This mental peace will arise only if our mind is conditioned by the removal of certain qualities and the injection of others. In the famous *Ṣaṭpadīstotra*, Śrī Śaṅkara beseeches God as follows:

(*avinayamapanaya*) O Lord! remove my *avinaya*, whatever does not make for humility.

(*damaya manaḥ*) Control my mind.

(*śamaya viṣayatṛṣṇam*) Stifle my thirst for sensuous enjoyment.

(*viśtāraya bhūtadayām*) Expand my concern for all beings.

Surely, if a man is helped to shake off his pride, control his mind, restrain his senses, and feel an inclusive love for everything in the world, he will automatically attain *śānti*, peace of mind, and cross the sea of *samsāra*. This must be the prayer on the lips of everyone.

A true devotee of God does not complain when he undergoes suffering. Sufferings are natural to man. In their afflictions, many persons complain against God that He is blind to their distresses and they even get angry with Him. They forget the many benefits that they have derived from Him, such as food, clothing, and shelter. Could they have had them without His grace? Instead of acknowledging these with joy and gratitude, they complain of a few afflictions that they do not wish to endure. They forget that the so-called sufferings *are visited on them for their good*. When a mother binds the hands of her child to keep him from eating mud, the child weeps; but the mother laughs, and the child gets angry. The good things that we get from God are signs of His grace. The sufferings have been invited on ourselves by ourselves. In fact, our troubles are ways in which God saves us from ourselves. Suffering is the medicine of life. When we suffer, we should pray to God to give us the strength to endure the suffering. A true *bhakta* is never disturbed by anything.



The Power of Prayer

Most of us are inspired to pray only at moments of emotional upheaval, when failure, success, or deep fears overwhelm us. At those times in our lives, says Swami Swahananda, "something is stirred up in man's heart; faith in a greater being or power is born, and prayer follows. Prayer is thus the deepest impulse of the soul of man."

Many know prayer only as a form of petition, a plea for a desired object or state, either for oneself or for someone else. But prayer can also take other forms, says Aldous Huxley, among others:

Prayer as adoration: an expression of love for God
Prayer as contemplation: union with the Divine

It is these higher forms of prayer that chasten us and mark a passage into higher states of consciousness. This kind of prayer brought to its culmination is a silent "standing before God," an unbroken state of union with the Higher. Prayer then is no longer the activity of a suppliant relative to a greater power, but is, instead, a state of being, one of total identification with the higher Reality.



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